FICTION, FORM AND RESISTANCE:

A STUDY OF THE NOVELS OF

DORIS LESSING AND TONI MORRISON

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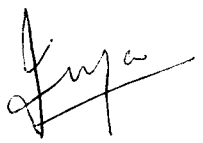
DECLARATION

I, P. S. Jaya, hereby declare that this thesis entitled *Fiction, Form and Resistance: A Study of the Novels of Doris Lessing and Toni Morrison* has not previously formed the basis for the award of any degree, diploma, fellowship or other similar title or recognition.



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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis entitled *Fiction, Form and Resistance: A Study of the Novels of Doris Lessing and Toni Morrison* submitted to the University of Calicut for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy is a record of bona fide research carried out by the candidate under my supervision and that no part of the thesis has been submitted for any degree before.

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PREFACE

This study attempts to explore how form as a means of resistance is operative in the narrative fiction of Doris Lessing and Toni Morrison. One of the most insistent beliefs that informs this work is that it is important to examine the particular ways in which the formal operations of Lessing's and Morrison's writings function ideologically, especially as these writers belong to marginalized groups. The novels selected for this study are *The Grass is Singing* (1950), *The Golden Notebook* (1962), *Briefing for a Descent into Hell* (1971), *The Summer Before the Dark* (1973), and *The Memoirs of a Survivor* (1974) of Lessing; and *The Bluest Eye* (1969), *Sula* (1973) *Song of Solomon* (1977), *Beloved* (1987), and *Jazz* (1992) of Morrison. Rosemary Jackson's book *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (1981) has been highly useful in formulating the theoretical framework of this study.

This thesis comprises four chapters besides the introductory section and the conclusion. The introduction provides the theoretical framework for the study. It tries

to connect form and resistance in fiction and analyses how form is instrumental in the act of subversion. The modes of fantasy are analysed as they are effective tools of resistance and subversion of various sorts. Chapter I discusses how madness functions as a potent strategy of resistance. Chapter II analyses the narrators and points of view in the writings of Lessing and Morrison and examines how they work to undermine traditional notions of storytelling. Chapter III focuses on the mythical element in their fiction, and how it is used to subvert the conventional compartmentalisation of time and anchor the narrative in realms outside time. Chapter IV undertakes to examine how Lessing and Morrison, in their attempts to come out of the constraints of dominant ideology, disrupt the notion of generic purity.

Both Lessing and Morrison have expressed acute misgivings as to the working of the dominant ideology and stressed the need for escaping the entrapment of received notions and the morass of conventional canonical structures. It is this common ground, which Lessing and Morrison share in spite of the disparities in their social backgrounds, that legitimises this project.

In the preparation of this thesis I am greatly indebted to my research supervisor Dr. Sherine Upot, whose

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CONTENTS

Introduction

P.S. Jaya “Fiction, form and resistance: A study of the novels of Doris Lessing and Toni Morrison” Thesis. Department of English , University of Calicut, 2001

Introduction

Fiction, it is generally agreed, is a creation, an artifice, something that is brought into being by artistic intercession. It is never an actual transcription of real life. No matter how faithfully a writer adheres to real life experience, what she/he writes is only an approximation of actuality. The writer chooses her/his matter from the realities of life and gives it an imaginative rendering. Fiction thus takes its existence through a world of its own, creating in the process its own fictional world. The reality of fiction, then, is undoubtedly different from everyday reality, and the writer of fiction is not just an observer of factual reality, but, a creator of fictitious life. According to Guy de Maupassant,

> The number of people in the world who die accidentally everyday is considerable. But, can we, in the middle of the narrative, allow a tile to fall on the

> head of a central character, or throw him under the wheels of a carriage, on the pretext that we must do justice to the part played by accident? (3)

Even though narrative fiction, as a literary genre, developed comparatively late in history, as Lennard J. Davis puts it, "novels have created or helped develop a mass neurosis" in readers which results from "visualising, analysing, experiencing a fantasy not their own, but which they believe in some provisional way to be true -- true enough to draw conclusions, form moral opinions, and even shape their own lives to fit" (2). Even when the reader thinks of an aspect of life, she/he finds her/his mind invaded and filled by similar events from novels she/he has read. Fiction enters into her/his psyche, moulds it, so that the world outside is seen through a 'fictional perspective'. Thus fiction conditions her/his perception of reality. These "remembered fictions appear as vivid experience, more real than the outer reality," for, "apart from the tangible reality of an object or event, there is another which is supplied by memory (Davis 3).

While highlighting the problem of what fiction has

done to its readers, Davis admits that fiction is instrumental in effecting a reconciliation with the realities of life by serving to "blur the distinction between illusion and reality, between fact and fiction, between symbol and what is represented" (3). Readers of fiction believe themselves to be partaking of reality, when, in fact, what they experience is an escape from reality or at the very least a remarkable deviation from it. The conscious artistry behind a work of fiction is so subtly achieved, that the reader is deceived into believing that the fictive work contains only factual reality and the experience of reading seems to be an actual immersion in the reality of life. Thus fiction becomes a form of narrative, which essentially fashions one's reading/misreading of reality.

Reality is not static, nor is it a homogeneous entity. It is something that changes with each person, each perception, each position and posture. It is a heterogeneous totality consisting of different but inter-related parts. Man seeks to perceive homogeneity in this heterogeneity and hopelessly fails. This makes life problematic, which in turn leads to the structuring of a

complex reality.

Life becomes complex and incomprehensible as experiences provide people with a reality too chaotic to be subjected to a definitive analysis. Novelists in their attempts to read the world by structuring experiences find their tools inadequate. Their experiments in technique are prompted by a genuine awareness of this complexity of life. They seek to escape what they see as the confining, imprisoning effects of artistic forms that have become too hackneyed to suit their new themes.

Fiction resists reality even at its inception as it is an artifice, a product of artistic mediation. But it pretends to establish an ordered reality, which appeals to readers as 'real' reality and gives them solace. To impose a homogeneous order on a heterogeneous reality is to make life a closed system, to bring it within a frame wherein each person gets a definite identity.

However realistic the modes of writing may be, narration in a fictive work inevitably distorts reality because it conceals the fact that a story is a construction rather than a representation of reality. The very idea of 'realistic fiction' thus becomes open to question. Vladimir

Nabokov advocates great caution with the concept of reality when he says in his postscript to *Lolita* that reality is "one of the few words which can mean nothing without quotes" (329). One of the clearest statements of the view that modern reality is peculiarly resistant to treatment in realistic fiction is to be found in Philip Roth's essay "Writing American Fiction":

> The American writer in the middle of the twentieth century has his hands full in trying to understand, describe and then make credible much of American reality. It stupefies, it sickens, it infuriates, and finally it is even a kind of embarrassment to one's own meagre imagination. The actuality is continually outdoing our talents. (127)

Robert Scholes defines realism as "a mode of writing that presents a world recognizably bound by the same laws as the world of the author" (7). Harry Levin calls realism "a willed tendency of art to approximate reality" (4). Although realistic and anti realistic fictional writing are often differentiated, no clear-cut distinction is possible

between the two because what one reader finds vividly realistic may seem to another too improbable to be real. Arnold Kettle classifies a highly fantastic and un-life-like story .like *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) as realistic on the ground that it has much to do with the actual problems and values of life (26). Austin Warren also observes that,

> The reality of a work of fiction - i.e., its illusion of reality, its effect on the reader as a convincing reading of life - is not necessarily or primarily a reality of circumstance, or detail, or common place routine.... Verisimilitude in detail is a means to illusion but often used, as in *Gulliver's Travels* as a decoy to entice the reader into some improbable or incredible situation which has "truth to reality" in some deeper than a circumstantial sense. (74)

It is precisely these simplistic notions of reality that post-modern writers have tried to redefine. They see reality as an artefact, a human construct, "historically

derived rather than naturally given" (Grant 7). They equivocate on the veracity of art, positioning their work as a polemic against the ubiquitous and visionary notion of its values,.

Arnold Kettle takes all art to be a means of escape as it gives people the capacity to escape from their present experience using their "accumulated consciousness" of the past to project a vision of the future. This, he says, is not a trivial or accidental by-product but the very essence of the value of art (12). Writers are very well aware of the protean shape of the world and hope to create an illusion of this enigmatic world in order to suspend, for the time being, the readers' suspicion that their own world lies for ever outside the scope of their comprehension.

No matter how faithfully a writer adheres to experience, what she/he writes is only an approximation of actuality. Fiction, being an imaginative creation, an artifice, the reality of fiction cannot help being something different from the reality of the empirical world. It is by a clever manipulation of this fictional reality that literature helps people "defend

themselves against certain negative features of modern society" (Davis 17).

Modern writers see the dissolution of a material reality, which had substantially fixed the forms of writing in a particular world. Gerald Graff, a critic of post-modern critical postures contends that "contemporary capitalistic reality is qualitatively different from all that has preceded it", and that "its reality is unreality" (10). This 'fictitious reality' challenges the raconteur/e to espouse her/his metier.

It is not the material in the raw that the reader encounters in a literary work, but the material as shaped and structured by formal devices. The Latin word 'fingo' from which 'fiction' originates, means 'to form' or 'to fashion'. This can mean that artistic expression is a formal way of seeing. The word 'form' is derived from the Latin 'forma', which means 'idea'. In literature, 'form' has come to refer either to a category like the 'novel form' or the 'poetic form' or to a work's organizing principle and mode of presentation. 'Form' and 'content' when used of a literary work denote aspects of the work that are mutually dependent and incapable of existing

independently. There is a meaningful correlation between the thematic content of a work and the formal devices employed by the writer to realise it.

What startles us to a new way of seeing is a new way of saying. The complexity and conflict endemic in the content result in the invention of new forms capable of representing and concretising them. In the words of Adorno,

> Literary form is not simply a unified and compressed reflection of the form of society, but a special means of distancing the reality and preventing the easy re-absorption of new insights into familiar and consumable packages. Modernists try to disrupt and fragment the picture of the modern life rather than master its dehumanising mechanisms (10).

Form is communication just as content is. Adorno contends that the absurd discontinuities of discourse, the pared-down characterisation, and plotlessness, all contribute to the aesthetic effect of distancing reality thereby giving us a 'negative' knowledge of modern

existence (10).

The question of the relation between form and content is a contentious area in literary and critical realms. According to Hegel, form is determined by the definite content of a work. He considers content as "nothing but the transformation of form into content", and form as "nothing but the transformation of content into form" (Eagleton 20). Georg Lukacs draws attention to the social significance of literary form, when he says that "the truly political element in literature is the form" (22). His contention, that the form of a work of art, rather than its abstractable content, is the true bearer of ideology, justifies the increased awareness and caution on the part of writers, especially those who belong to marginalized groups, in manoeuvring form. The proponents of the Formalist school of the 1920s takes this idea further when they foreground formal patterns and technical devices of literature, even to the exclusion of subject matter and social values from its focus.

A transformation in form invariably signifies a transformation in ideology. Terry Eagleton considers form to be a crystallization of certain dominant ideological

structures where form embodies a specific set of relations between author and readers (26).

Form often becomes a locus of resistance, political and otherwise in fiction. This is especially true of post-modern fiction where form functions as a potent strategy of subversion. Rosemary Jackson brings out the unique relationship between form and the reader through her observation that "texts subvert only if the reader is disturbed by their dislocated narrative form" (23). The present study -- *Fiction, Form and Resistance: A Study Of the Novels of Doris Lessing and Toni Morrison* -- aims to explore how this function of form as a means of resistance is operative in the narrative fiction of Doris Lessing and Toni Morrison.

Form in fiction is a metaphor of social reality and it is when it ceases to be relevant as a metaphor that there is the desire to reinvent form. The struggle against the conventional is the inevitable result of a disregard for the existing way of thinking or for the existing form. Ronald Sukenik's words are relevant in this regard:

> Form is itself a metaphor and that of fiction is perhaps the most inclusive

> of all for our society. The form of traditional novel is a metaphor for a society that no longer exists. . . .Its present function is to sustain a series of comforting illusions, among which one might include the feeling, emotion, that the individual is the significant focus among the phenomena of everyday 'reality' (characterisation); the sense that clock or public time is finally the reigning form of duration for the consciousness (historical narration); the notion that the locus of 'reality' may be determined by one's empirical observation(description); the conviction that the world is logical and totally comprehensible to one (causal sequence, plot). (3)

The most noticeable feature of any great novel of the twentieth century is the tremendous degree of formal experiment and innovation that it employs. From the foregoing argument it is obvious that such innovations are

brought about when the existing form is no longer relevant as a metaphor of social reality. The failure of form as a metaphor could be due to the obliteration of a shared system of beliefs, values and meanings. Bergonzi remarks that writers are unable to write now as Tolstoy did because "we have no common sense of reality. We are saddled with all kinds of relativistic structures of consciousness. We do not believe in there being one reality 'out there' as undoubtedly Tolstoy did" (200). This is indicative of the increasing complexity of life. However, the diversity of experiences and perceptions is not the only raison d'etre for the complexity of life. Power in its myriad manifestations of politics is a key contributor to this complexity.

Each literary work exists within the power structures which control life in the society. These power structures have devastating influence on the lives of people who do not wield power. Literary texts articulate values of an unquestionably political nature that are embedded in the social and ideological discourse of the time. The social significance of these politically charged values closes in upon the marginalized with unbearable and

suffocating force.

It is indisputably agreed that the relationship between those who belong to marginalized groups and those who belong to dominant cultures, is much more strained today than ever before. This preponderance of those who occupy the centre and the absence of an alternative for those who are liminal is presaged in the work of as early a writer as George Eliot. When Maggie Tulliver, who is unable to trace a definitive direction in her life complains to Tom, "you are a man Tom, and have power, and can do something in this world", Tom asserts, "then, if you can do nothing, submit to those who can" (*The Mill on the Floss* 115). This lopsidedness in the balance of power is all the more distinct in contemporary cultural discourse between those who occupy pivotal positions and those who are on the periphery.

To many twentieth century women writers their relationship to the dominant culture is a harrowing experience. To escape this reality they break with the traditional forms of narrative which are informed by socio-political authority and its hegemonic structures. In literature, these power structures take the shape of

certain pre-set forms and modes of writing. It is through the subversion of these themes and forms in fiction that writers belonging to marginalized groups work out their resistance. For, to break with these canonical structures is to break with the powers of the society which inform these structures. These writers do not locate their texts within patriarchal myths and traditions. While discarding the established modes of writing, they feel free to use patterns that suit their kaleidoscopic experiences.

The discord and disorder endemic in themes result in the invention of a formal structure capable of concretising and imparting these themes. Women writers thus use form to explode the fixed architecture of the narrative and thereby resist their excruciating experience of reality. While subverting the forms of the conventional narrative and breaking its sequence they resist the patriarchal social structure and the political social authority that these forms represent.

This is especially true of post-modernist fiction where form functions as a potent strategy of both subversion and resistance. Resistance in literary works is

not something that merely operates through the narrative, against a clearly definable set of power relations. While it consciously seeks to oppose those patterns and codes that are informed by the dominant structures of society, it is not in agreement with any genre, trope, figure or mode, which nurture the illusion of a smooth relationship between the reader and the text. Resistance is a political strategy of subversion. It is the modus operandi of women writers and ethnic minorities trying to find a voice, a place among the structures and referential codes of dominant literary and social texts. It resists the dominant patriarchal society and its attempts at totalization and marginalisation.

The concept of resistance is distinctly put forward by Selwyn Cudjoe in his book *Resistance and Caribbean Literature* (1956), and by Barbara Harlow in her book *Resistance Literature* (1967). According to them, resistance is an act, or a set of acts, that is designed to rid a people of their oppressors, and it so thoroughly infuses the experience of living under oppression that it becomes an almost autonomous aesthetic principle.

Resistance, in connection with literature, can thus be

seen as that category of literary writing, which presents itself as an integral part of an organised struggle for liberation and contains severe protest against oppression.

Padmini Mongia observes that,

> Literary resistance ... can be seen as a form of contractual understanding between text and reader, one which is embedded in an experiential dimension and buttressed by a political and cultural aesthetic at work in the culture. (11)

Subversion helps see things in a new light, through a disruption of the patina of familiar conventions. It reveals the inadequacy of the present system in the newly added complexity of life. It challenges the canonical notion of fiction and attempts to come out of its parameters by relocating fictional writing. The modes used by male/oppressor/canonical writer have always been subjugating the marginalized. So the resurrection needs new modes, innovative and powerful enough to re-define the centre/periphery relations.

Deviation from and resistance to the dominant modes of writing have become the defining feature of many modern

writers especially of those belonging to liminal positions. This resistance can be seen at work in many of the novels of Doris Lessing and Toni Morrison. It operates in their fiction as a means of defence and as a protest against both personal despair and social oppression. Lessing and Morrison took their writings to a different realm by positioning their works as defensive structures against the dehumanising symptoms of modern life. These writers do not equivocate on political issues and their novels articulate values that are of an unquestionably political nature, which are embedded in the social and ideological discourse of the time.

There is a sense in which all art is political because it reflects some vision of the world. Even novels which on the surface appears to have nothing to do with politics, may carry a strong message. The writings of Lessing and Morrison also are political, not just literary or personal. In *The Golden Notebook* (1962), Lessing's protagonist Anna says of such novels: "If Marxism means anything, it means that a little novel about the emotions should reflect, " what's real" since emotions are a function and a product of a society" (42). Such statements reflect an awareness

that novels can be political without being propagandistic and without losing artistic merit. In the article, "Radicalism in the American Novel", Richard Chase argues that even art while presumably dealing with the individual psyche has political ramifications and makes a silent statement about the relative importance of the individual versus class or social reality (56).

Toni Morrison distinctly puts forward the correlation that must exist between the politics of art and ideology.

> If anything I do, in the way of writing novels (or whatever I write),isn't about the village or the community or about you, then it is not about anything. I am not indulging myself in some private, closed exercise of of my imagination that fulfils only the obligation of my personal dreams which is to say yes, that, the work must be political. . . . It seems to me that the best art is political and you ought to make it political, unquestionably political and at the

> same time irrevocably beautiful. ("The Art of Fiction" 4)

Unravelling the political commitments and formal deflections of the novels of Doris Lessing and Toni Morrison will alert us to the ways in which narrative form, like thematic content, is never politically neutral.

Doris Lessing's faith in the immense potentiality of form is evident when she says that, "one can embody wisdom in the form of a work of art, even though its content may elude the intellect" ("Personal Voice" 24).

The Golden Notebook self-consciously challenges the realistic techniques of writing. It is a carefully structured novel about writing novels. Lessing remarks that,

> It is an attempt to break form; to break certain forms of consciousness and go beyond them. . . . My major aim was to shape a book which would make its own comment, a word-less statement; to talk through the way it was shaped. (Preface to *GN* XII-XIII)

Like all meta-fictional writing, *The Golden Notebook* provides a critique of the method of writing fiction and the fundamental structures of the genre. While subverting any attempt to equate fiction with reality it explores the possible fictionality of everyday reality as well. In an interview with Florence Howe, Lessing says that the way it is constructed says what the book is about (7).

In Althusser's words, what art makes us see is "the ideology from which it is born, in which it bathes, from which it detaches itself as art, and to which it alludes", and literature achieves this distanciation through literary form (Selden 460).

A preoccupation with form in a literary work of art tends to move in the direction of the subversive. For, an offshoot of such thinking leads to the realisation that words cease to have fixed meaning. All comforting illusions like the accessibility of empirical observation to reality and the logicality and comprehensiveness of the world are shattered. For writers the familiar world works as a metaphor for familiar literary conventions, themes, narrative strategies and language, while passing beyond this world of familiar reality to an unknown world means

breaking the boundaries of literary convention in order to have new experiences and to find new and stimulating forms of expression. Through this movement they debunk the hidden assumptions underlying literary conventions such as objectivity or neutrality of point of view, transparency of language, and the hegemony of reason and logic.

Lessing and Morrison question the meaning and relation of the real and the non-real in such a way that the real can neither claim any superiority over the non-real, nor can it be taken for granted. The plurality and multifariousness of reality and the treacherous trap it sets for the marginalized lead these writers to the realms of the fantastic in their fiction. While fiction is instrumental in effecting the blurring of boundaries between reality and illusion, these writers use techniques that serve the purpose of further blurring the boundaries between fictional reality and fictional illusion.

When the pre-supposed reality is seldom found in the given reality, another deeper, more essential reality is constructed to alleviate the parochialism in the world around. To move into the world of unreality is to escape

the excruciating reality of the unfair world. The pain and paraplegia consequent upon the venal practices of the dominant culture, the chaos and senselessness which the reality presents, leave writers who belong to marginalized groups under no obligation to conform to these artefacts.

Lessing was initially drawn to realism because she believed that realism, as epitomized in the nineteenth century novel, was the mode best suited to express " the individual conscience in its relation with the collective" ("Personal Voice" 14). But a little later, in *The Golden Notebook*, Lessing was questioning the adequacy of realism to do justice to experience through fiction. Lessing experienced a contradiction between the conservative tendencies of realist narrative and the need for revaluation of social conventions. In Lessing's work it is this contradiction that accounts for the move, "off into fantasy", for, "I could no longer say what I wanted to say inside the old form" (*Newsletter* 5). The expression of something new requires a new narrative form. This led Lessing to interrupt *The Children of Violence* series, with the radically innovative novel, *The Golden Notebook*, which Lessing described as "expressing a sense of despair about

writing a conventional novel" (Howe 81).

The works of both Doris Lessing and Toni Morrison display a dwindling faith in the conventional modes of writing. A variety of new patterns are employed to express the new vision of life. However, the break with the conventional forms of narration is not disguised as it is in the case of some nineteenth century women writers like Jane Austen and George Eliot. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar in their study of nineteenth century women novelists bring out the subversive elements in Jane Austen's novels. Austen undermines the prevailing values through the 'duplicity' of the 'happy endings' of the novels. Austen brings the couples in her novels "to the brink of bliss in such haste . . . or with such sarcasm that the entire message is undercut" (168-169).

Both Lessing and Morrison use the modes of the fantastic in their fiction to undo the unifying structures and significations that are directed by the dominant culture and which sustain the social order. In their attempt to come out of the parameters of the social and ideological discourse of the time and the established notions of fiction, they feel that they are able to do

justice to their role as writers, especially as they belong to marginalized groups. Instead of positioning themselves in congruence with the world as perceived in the ordinary waking state, these novelists give credibility to 'realities' perceived in other states of consciousness as in the fantastic. They weave the elements of fantasy into the texture of their fiction with a deep political sensitivity.

The writings of Lessing and Morrison aim at a radical reviewing of the social text and the dominant culture's monopoly of meanings. By exploding the fixed architecture of the narrative, they resist hegemonic power structures. Their search for new forms lays stress on the fact that there is more than one way of seeing, thinking, and living the world.

To quote Adorno,

> ". . . the moment of unreality and the non-existence in art is not independent of the existent, as though it were posited or invented by some unreality. It is a structure which results from quantitative relations between

> elements of being, relations that are in turn, a response to, and an echo of, the imperfections of real conditions, their constraints, their contradictions and also their potentialities". (*Art, Society, and Aesthetics* 10)

Fantasy is perhaps the best device of subversion. Judith Butler observes that, it is the "principal medium of transgressive reinscription" (568). It makes reason confront all that it traditionally refuses to encounter. It questions the frustratingly finite categories of the real. It is "based on and controlled by an overt violation of what is generally accepted as possibility" (Irwin IX). Fantasy fulfils a desire for a better, more complete and unified reality that is no more painful. It attains its most uncompromising mood, when it interrogates the nature of the real.

Rosemary Jackson elaborates on Todorov's study on the effects of the fantastic in texts, and its means of operation as expressed in Todorov's book, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* (1973). Jackson explores the social and political implication of the

fantastic as a literary form:

> A more extensive treatment would relate texts more specifically to the real conditions of their production, and to the particular constraints against which fantasy protests, and from which it is generated, for, fantasy characteristically attempts to make up, compensate for a lack resulting from cultural constraints: it is a literature of desire, a literature which seeks that which is experienced as absence and loss. (3)

The impetus behind creating the fantastic is the desire for transcending reality, for escaping the human condition and constructing superior, alternate worlds. According to Sigmund Freud, the area of fantasy is one of concealed desire (65). This is not an outright rejection of reality; on the other hand, it takes reality and breaks it. It plays with real things, which it combines into arbitrary, non-existent forms.

Rosemary Jackson contends that fantasy can operate in

two ways in expressing desire. It can manifest desire, or it can expel desire when the desire is a disturbing element which threatens mental equilibrium. In many cases fantasy fulfils both functions at once, for desire can be expelled through having been expressed:

> The fantastic in literature points to or suggests the basis upon which cultural order rests, for, it opens up, for a brief moment, on to disorder, on to illegality, on to that which lies outside the law, that which is outside the dominant systems of values. The fantastic traces the unsaid, and the unseen of culture; that which has been silenced, made invisible, covered over, and made 'absent'. (4)

Fantasy is a telling index of the limit of the dominant cultural order. It reveals the tension between the laws of human society and the resistance of the individual consciousness to these laws. It refuses to regurgitate the equations of tutelage. As Mikhail Bakhtin expresses it,

> The fantastic serves . . . not in the

> positive *embodiment* of the truth, but in the search after the truth, its provocation and, most importantly, its *testing*. (94)

The word 'fantasy', as it is derived from the Latin word 'phantasticus' means that which is made visible, visionary, and unreal. In this general sense all art is fantastic. But when applied to a particular literary mode, fantasy defines itself by its obdurate refusal of prevailing definitions of the real or the possible, a refusal amounting at times to violent opposition.

> A fantasy is a story based on and controlled by an overt violation of what is generally accepted as the possibility; it is the narrative result of transforming the condition contrary to fact into 'fact' itself. (Irwin X)

It is pertinent to lay stress on the particular constraints against which the modes of fantasy protest, against which these are generated and examine how this resistance is operative in fiction. Modern fantasy is rooted in ancient myth, mysticism, folklore, fairytale, and

romance. An examination of the conditions and the possibilities of fantasy as a literary mode in terms of its forms, features, basic elements and structures will reveal the subversive and the transgressive potentiality of form in fiction.

Fantasy is particularly interested in the 'profoundly' unconscious realms. It transcends the rigidity of space and time. Chronological time, with its demarcations into the past, the present, and the future is completely destroyed. Fantasy refuses to believe in unified and consistent characterisation. The multiplicity of narrative voices and the employment of 'unreliable' characters save the writer from the sin of committing herself/himself to any particular point of view. The rejection of a linear movement of narration leaves the work open, dissatisfied and endlessly desiring. Fantasy does not believe in the neutrality of language. Genre ceases to be a separating category in the domain of the fantastic.

This study tries to bring the narrative fiction of Doris Lessing and Toni Morrison under a common theoretical framework. As far as the forms of narration employed are concerned, both of them display a similar attitude to

canonical literary tradition. Questions of form, content, art and politics converge in their novels in a similar pattern, at once defending the utter fragility of any delicately constituted fiction and denying its artificiality. The dominant/colonial/white/male/ culture, they feel, is not likely to produce literature/theory that will challenge domination of various kinds, or promote a breakdown in traditional ways of seeing and thinking about the prevalent conditions. In their struggle to challenge the colonial, imperialist paradigms that attempt to totalise and marginalize, they use similar techniques to enforce and sustain their identity.

The authenticity and potential of white settler women's resistance to the dominant culture's monopoly have become the subject of much debate in the post colonial era. Post-colonial critics like Robin Visel have dealt at length with the dilemma of associating the problems of white colonial women writers with those of black women writers, and bringing them under the same theoretical purview. Such critics argue that the white settler woman can at best be described only as half colonised. But as Kirsten Holst Peterson and Anna Rutherford claim in their work, *A Double*

Colonisation: Colonial and Post-colonial Women's Writing, all women in colonial and post-colonial countries are "doubly colonised -- by the patriarchal society as well as by the dominant imperial or metropolitan power" (8-9). The fact that the white settler woman occupies a privileged position in comparison to the native or the slave descended woman does not make things easier for her. It is true that the colonial woman is slightly privileged -- even while suffering from a double handicap -- when compared to the triple jeopardy of the black woman. The white woman's dilemma lies in what Visel calls, "the guilt of the colonist," which she is made to share (32). But even while sharing the guilt, she never enjoys the power of the coloniser.

It is at this point that the affinity between the white settler woman and the black native woman draws closer. The white woman is in a way more confused and ambiguous about her role in the resistance movements. In her attempts to be involved in the subversive gestures of the black woman, she is constantly under the threat of being misunderstood.

This is the dilemma that writers like Nadine Gordimer

and Doris Lessing face. Considered as she was, an interloper among them by the Africans, Lessing felt herself to be an outsider who was at the same time never at home among the English against whom she matched white settler illusions in her non-fiction and novels. Lessing experienced the status of an exile in both Africa and England, and this led her to deal at length with the problematic of identification between white women and black women in South Africa. The white woman who ventures into the black arena seeking expression through political action, has to face some amount of resistance from the blacks. However, the white woman cannot withdraw in the face of this resistance because the oppression suffered as a woman draws her towards the colonised black woman.

Lessing's short story, "The Old Chief Mshlanga"(1952), is often quoted as an example of a white woman's share of responsibility and participation in destroying black culture. But it can also be read as a text that exemplifies her dilemma when she is made responsible for the destruction of a black settlement, in spite of her ignorance and unwillingness.

In "The Old Chief Mshlanga", the unnamed main character, a young South African colonial girl, goes into the old chief's country only to realise that she too is branded as one of the 'destroyers'. She is not allowed to voice her premonition of the destruction of the land. After chief Mshlanga and his people are removed to facilitate white settlement, she makes a last visit to the site of the village to find it in ruins. Although as a mere girl she has no power to prevent the tragedy, as a daughter of the invaders, she has to share in the responsibility. In the foreword to *An Ill-fated People* (1979), Lessing has said, "the children and grand children of these invaders condemn their parents, wish they could repudiate history. More than everybody else, women bear the guilt" (15).

Lessing elaborates on the problematic position of the daughter of the invaders in the *Children of Violence* series. Martha Quest's legacy of violence includes the colonisation of Africa, a history, which she was born into, which she deplores, but which, by virtue of her white skin privilege, she colludes in. She awakens to an understanding of herself and her history through her identification with the Africans who are themselves awakening to their latent

powers. Martha expresses her identification with the blacks, as well as her rebellion against white settler mores, by joining a communist group whose stated aim is black liberation. Marginalized and alienated as she is -- as a woman in a male dominated society, as a white in Africa, and as an exile in England -- the root of her dilemma lies in her unwilling, ambiguous role of a female colonist.

Doris Lessing was born of British parents in Persia (now in Iran) in 1919. She was taken to Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) when she was six. As a white woman in southern Rhodesia, Lessing was an interloper among the blacks, an exile from England. She sailed for England in 1949 with the manuscript of her first novel, *The Grass is Singing*, which was published in 1950. It was an immediate success and her fame gained steadily ever since.

Nancy Hardin praises Lessing for the use of fantasy which in her novels is the "locus of a saving vision" that will teach one to "break out and away from contemporary condition" and enable one to "awake from the roles to which we have been so skilfully programmed" (319).

The Golden Notebook is an extraordinarily radical

experiment in structure which anticipates the later novelistic challenges to realism from *Briefing for a Descent into Hell* (1971) to *The Memoirs of a Survivor* (1975), from *The Summer Before the Dark* (1973) to science fiction.

The Golden Notebook is a critique of traditional realism, of language as a transparent medium and of fiction as a representation of some objective reality. The innovative fragmentation of structure in the novel includes a parody of the inadequacy of a realist novel, Free Women to say anything. *The Golden Notebook* is often praised for its portrayal of woman's liberation from traditional female roles. It is also a novel about art and its role in a fragmented and chaotic culture. Anna Wulf's experience as a writer is at the centre of Lessing's concerns in the book. Its whole structure is predicated on the problem that Anna faces as a writer -- her inability to overcome her writer's block. The immensity of events mutes her: " the world is so chaotic, art is irrelevant" (*GN* 42). Anna feels unable to cope with language:

> I am increasingly afflicted by vertigo where words can mean nothing . . . they

> have become . . . not the form into which the experience is shaped, but a series of only meaningless sounds . . . what is happening is breakdown of me, Anna, and this is how I am becoming aware of it. For words are form, and, if I am at a pitch, where shape, form, expression are nothing, then, then I am nothing, for it has become clear to me reading the notebooks, that I remain Anna because of a certain kind of intelligence. This intelligence is dissolving and I am very much frightened. (*GN* 475-77)

Like *The Golden Notebook*, the other novels of Lessing also make a radical examination of the possibilities of the novel form, and incorporate the lessons of her innovative experiments in form.

Lessing's rejection of the linear movement of narrative can be detected in many of the novels. The technique of cyclic movement is employed successfully in *The Summer Before the Dark* where the reader is made to

follow the route of Kate Browne's quest. Kate fruitfully completes her quest in a dignified manner and with full awareness of her own identity. Kate, like Martha Quest of *Children of Violence*, undergoes a series of quests and returns completely changed and educated. She decides to retain her grey hair that had many times been coloured and styled to conform to an accepted standard of suburban fashion.

> Her experiences of the last months, her discoveries, her self definition; what she hoped were now strengths, were concentrated here - that she would walk into her home with her hair undressed, with her hair tied straight back for utility; rough and streaky, and the widening grey band showing like a statement of intent . . . her hair - no one was going to lay hands on that. (*SBD* 244)

The Summer Before the Dark gives some hints of the failed illusions of domesticity. This novel is highly language conscious and has passages on the 'false' language

of memory, and the symbolic and meaningful language of dreams (70). Kate is an expert translator, and to the people who hire her she is 'language' (33).

Briefing for a Descent into Hell also refuses to account for the fictionality of its worlds, which are completely ungoverned by conventional political and social systems. It undermines the notion of consistency in characterisation and normalcy of perception. Its principal character, whose point of view reveals much of the story line, is a patient at a mental hospital. The doctors take him out of the circle of his inner journey only to throw him into the whirlpool of a more insane world. He is deprived of the security of his mental reality and thrown into a disastrous outer reality.

In *Martha Quest* (1972), the first of the five books of *Children of Violence* series, the conventional pattern of the quest narrative is thwarted when the cyclic pattern resists closure and a sense of completion. Lessing, as Katherine Fishburn says, " in the very title she chose, she violates the traditional quest narrative by naming a woman as hero" (201).

Artistic form attains wider scope when it is

subversive of established cultural patterns. In *The Four Gated City* (1974) through Lynda's troubled and fractured consciousness, Lessing explores the fragmented consciousness of contemporary life and society. The suggestion is that since perceptions of reality are highly subjective, it does not matter whether the mind through which the world is viewed is fragmented and troubled or normal and intact. In this novel also, as in *Briefing*, Lessing posits madness as a saner form of resisting a world, which is more insane and complex.

The Memoirs of a Survivor (1974) successfully exemplifies the usefulness of literary fantasy, which helps Lessing free the novel from many of the conventions and restraints of realistic texts in its violation of the unities of time and space. Perhaps, of all the works of Lessing, this novel makes the most use of unconventional techniques. It is identified by Lessing as an 'attempt at autobiography' (*MS* 221). This is a novel in which reality is thoroughly subverted. It describes the life of a woman who is able to live in two alternating worlds -- the one a vague, near future, and the other, a world in which the recent past and a dream-like fantasy lie intertwined. This

incomprehensible world attracts the reader by suggesting that fictionality is the essence of reality. Moreover, the anonymous narrator claims to be writing a history -- "this is a history, after all, and I hope a truthful one" (*MS* 5). But the narration being the record of two planes of consciousness one of which is the future, obviously cannot be history in the traditional sense of the term. Here the author shatters the very basic notions of history. Throughout the novel the reader is made to shuttle between two incomprehensible worlds -- the physical world presented 'realistically', and the world which is not time-bound and space-bound. Like *The Golden Notebook*, *The Memoirs of a Survivor* too has a very complex narrative structure.

In almost all of her novels Lessing has been experimenting with techniques which are anti-realistic. The alienation from, and the withdrawal of 'reality' which is the hallmark of extremely self-conscious modern fiction, is in fact a rejection of the contradictions of realistic fiction. Realistic fiction, while claiming to represent life realistically obliterates the complexity of life. Twentieth century women writers' use of strategies that

sever the narrative from conventional fiction is conscious and undisguised. They do not search for covert modes to express their indignation at the canonical notions of fiction, that are the products of the patriarchal order and perpetuate its values. In their experiments with newer forms of expression, and through their break with the sequence of canonical fiction, women writers are able to give form and expression to the complexities of life as never before.

Black writing exploded on the literary scene in the 1960s in the context of the civil rights and the black power movements. It profoundly changed conventional literary wisdom by insisting on the black perception of the world and a recognition of black literary activities. A different kind of writing emerged in the technical sophistication of the writings of black women writers who were acutely aware of the dialectic of black American culture, which W.E.B. Dubois calls "double consciousness", the cognition of being both black and American -- of having ties to Africa but living in a land of slavery and oppression controlled by non-blacks:

The Negro is a sort of seventh son,

> born with a veil and gifted with a second sight in this American world -- a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but, only lets him see through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul, by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness -- an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings: two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (214-15)

The discovery and affirmation of the truth about the black experience in the United States of America has been one of the preoccupations of black American writers. They are reluctant to write in a world dominated and informed by their relationship to a white culture. Resistance to the

dominant discourses has been manifested by various groups of black writers and critics within black communities at different historical moments.

> The western critical tradition has a canon, as the western literary tradition does. I once thought it our most important gesture to *master* the canon of criticism, to *imitate* and apply it, but now I believe that we must turn to the black tradition itself to develop theories of criticism indigenous to our literatures. (Gates 13)

Black women writers always found themselves on the periphery of three literary traditions -- white American, predominantly male African American, and white feminist -- and realising the meagre chances of gaining recognition in any of them, created a body of literature that could voice their grievances.

> African Americans continue to be used as the terrain, upon which contested notions about race, gender, and sexuality are worked out. Yet, while black men have

> increasingly been the focus of debates about sexuality in the academy and the media, the specific ways in which black women figure in these discourses have remained, to a large extent, unanalysed and untheorised. Construction of black women's sexuality has been in a binary opposition to that of white women. It is rendered simultaneously invisible, visible (exposed), hyper visible, and pathologized in dominant discourses of the time. (Moya 121)

Black American women writers are preoccupied with political issues -- mainly racial and sexual. Toni Morrison made it clear when she said in her Nobel Prize acceptance speech,

> I write for black women . . . we are not addressing the men, as some white female writers do. We are not attacking each other, as both black and white men do. Black women writers look at things in an unforgiving, loving way. They are

writing to re-possess, re-name, re-own.

Morrison's work does not easily lend itself to a unified critical analysis. In all her novels the reader confronts a dialectic of tension between the desiring self of the individual and the ethical self of the society. This dialectic of tension offers a variety of critical perspectives.

Morrison has much in common with Lessing as far as the techniques of narration are concerned. Lessing too has resisted the totalising view of canonical writing and individualised her voice. As Morrison remarks in "The Art of Fiction",

> It is important not to have a totalising view. In American literature we have been so totalised -- as though there is only one version. We are not one indistinguishable block of people who always have the same way. (115)

Toni Morrison's first novel, *The Bluest Eye* (1970), was published when black cultural nationalism was at its height, when most African American literature featured male protagonists and when the women's movements were gaining

visibility. Along with Alice Walker's *The Third Life of Grange Copeland, The Bluest Eye* signalled a shift in the shape and emphasis of contemporary American literature. Women began to occupy a central role, the diversity of black communities began to be explored more persistently, and relationships among blacks rather than only those between blacks and whites, began to occupy more legitimate positions in the African American literary scenario.

The Bluest Eye narrates the story of Pecola who loses her sense of reality in her intense desire to attain blue eyes. Surrounded by Shirley Temples, she accepts the white concept of beauty and at last finds solace in madness, which is beneficent enough to 'give' her the bluest of eyes.

Like *The Bluest Eye, Sula* (1974) also foregrounds the African American woman in the 1920s through the 1940s, this time in relation to friendship -- an unusual subject in fiction. As in the case of Pecola, Shadrack also finds his abode of consolation and peace in madness. Shadrack is a psychologically ill, yet prophetic figure, who has experienced the horrors of World War I. He has seen the

face of a fellow soldier flying off and his headless body running "with energy and grace, ignoring altogether the drip and slide of brain tissue from its back" (8). In *Sula,* a black heroine consciously embraces the role of a pariah, and shatters the image of the conventional black woman in Western literature who confines herself to the norms of the black community.

Tracing the family history of the Deads in *Song of Solomon* (1977), Morrison covers nearly a century of American history, combining it with the rich African American oral and musical tradition. Morrison makes extensive use of myth in the novel, without using too many mythical allusions. Myth is the device by which Milkman's discovery of his culture and roots is made. The realm of myth enables him to transcend the temporal limitations of the present and assimilate history into the existing system of society.

Leslie Harris says that,

> "If we are to follow Morrison's lead and concentrate on growth of Macon Dead, we find that her novel is cohesive, following the clear pattern

> of birth and youth, alienation, quest, and confrontation common to mythic heroes as disparate as Moses, Achilles and Beowulf." (70)

While class issues were decidedly a concern in *The Bluest Eye* and *Sula*, the relationship between class and race is central in *Song of Solomon*. It is based on the African American folk tale about a captured African who flew back to Africa to escape slavery.

Tar Baby (1983) takes its title from another African American folk tale in the Brer Rabbit cycle. In it Morrison probes the insights that stories provide to African Americans in a country where they have been systematically oppressed. Its setting in the contemporary period makes it different from other novels, though it shares with the others the inevitable backward and forward movement in time. Moreover, much of the action takes place outside the United States, and it features white characters as major figures. *Tar Baby* is "deeply perceptive of the black's desire to create a mythology of his own" (Irving 31). The story resembles the myth of creation of human beings from clay. The pleasures of Eden are reflected

in Jadine, when she says that the Isle de Chevaliers "... exaggerated everything. Too much light. Too much shadow. Too much rain. Too much foliage and much too much sleep" (57). Mythmaking is often an evocation of the past, which results from the unbearability of the present.

Beloved (1987) explores the nature of mother love and is obsessed with issues of 'ownership' as the basis of American ideology, especially as they are grounded in the institution of slavery and affect even the supposedly personal terrain of motherhood. *Beloved*, in which a development of the goddess image can be traced, has a pattern of psycho-religious images and myths creating a universe that proves fully accountable to contemporary culture and to the black's struggle for equality, dignity and power. The psycho-religious images, "reflected through the revelations of marginal characters and mythologies, exhibit a Dionysian energy that is distinctly female" (Tate 15). For the labyrinthine pattern of a novel like this, it is difficult to conform to the compartmentalisation of time as the narrative is fixed neither in the past nor in the present nor in the future. Like *The Bluest Eye, Beloved* is also revealed through

multiple points of view.

Jazz (1992), set in the 1920s, is also sparked off by a historical event. Like the instruments in a jazz suite, the points of view of the major characters play with and against that of the narrator. This gives spontaneity to the narrative, which is the main attraction of the jazz performance. The comparative serenity of tone of the former part and the confused latter part of the narrative correspond to the softness with which a jazz performance begins and the pandemonium with which it ends.

Toni Morrison is highly conscious of the kind of form to be used in her fiction. The works reveal that Morrison is in constant search for new patterns. In "The Art of Fiction" Morrison says:

> I was always conscious of the constructed aspect of the writing process, and that art appears natural and elegant only as a result of constant practice, and constant awareness of its formal structures. (16)

Morrison's experience as a black in the predominantly

white culture of America informs her influential non-fiction collection, *Playing in the Dark* (1991), which proposes that America developed a powerful ideology of whiteness because the Europeans in America could unite, whatever their ethnic or class differences, unlike the blacks. Morrison demonstrates this thesis through her analysis of works by major American writers, like Herman Melville, Mark Twain and Tennessee Williams, and thus contributes to the intellectual debate over what it means to be an American and how blacks assess American literature.

Morrison's works are representative of African American life -- a life still intimately in touch with an immigrant feeling, a life deeply immersed in the gender-race-class complexes of modern America, a life in which position and identity have continually to be discovered and defined. The strength of her works manifest a coalescence of devices, both literary and linguistic, which facilitate a revision of the historical and cultural texts of black women's experiences. Fulfilling her own criteria for excellence, Morrison provides "no final chord" and leaves her reader with "a quality of hunger and disturbance that

never ends" (McKay 421).

Madness as Hyper Reality: Projection of Aberrated Consciousness

P.S. Jaya “Fiction, form and resistance: A study of the novels of Doris Lessing and Toni Morrison” Thesis. Department of English , University of Calicut, 2001

Chapter I Madness as Hyper Reality: Projection of Aberrated Consciousness

Both Doris Lessing and Toni Morrison make it clear that they consider their freaks, outsiders, tarts and perverts to be far more imaginative and normal than the apparently normal and ordinary people. In their novels the movement beyond categories and compartmentalisation is connected with mental illness or emotional collapse. Abnormal psychological states conventionally categorized as hallucination, dream, insanity, paranoia are used by these writers with the objective of erasing the rigid demarcations of gender and genre. These abnormal states, which are the manifestations of an underlying resistance, structure the entire world-view of their characters.

Both Doris Lessing and Toni Morrison pose a radical critique of reality and narrative realism through the exploration of the 'abnormal' consciousness. In many of their novels madness is projected as a peculiar creative

manifestation of the aberrated consciousness. Postmodernists like Gerald Graff maintain that, " the reality of the contemporary capitalistic reality is its unreality" .(75). True to this position, Lessing and Morrison feel that they cannot do justice to this world of unreality by positioning themselves in congruence with the world as perceived in the ordinary waking state, for this would deny credibility to 'realities' perceived in other states of awareness such as madness, hallucination and dream.

Leading exponents of post-modern psychology give credence to this view of Lessing's and Morrison's when they challenge the traditional belief that mental sanity is a pre-requisite for a coherent sense of identity and reality. It is to subvert the one dimensionality promoted by the social structure that writers who resist dominant power structures make use of the perception of the abnormal in their writings.

In the writings of Lessing and Morrison one can see the breaking down of the division between reality and unreality and find it being replaced by what these writers would like to call, a 'hyper reality'. It is through

various modes of the fantastic that this hyper reality is manifested in their fiction. Rosemary Jackson observes that fantasy transcends reality, "escapes the miseries of human condition and constructs superior, alternate worlds" (3). It fulfils the desire for a better, more complete and satisfying reality. It tells us of the possible means of realising desire, which may otherwise remain unrealised; it helps to make visible the invisible and to discover absence. Fantasy "traces the unsaid, the unseen and the untouched of culture, that which has been muted, made invisible, covered over, made absent and almost extinct" (Jackson 4-5). It makes an obdurate refusal of prevailing definitions of the real or the possible, a refusal amounting at times even to violent opposition.

The most potent strategy of this subversion has been the use of madness in fiction. Madness becomes the tool by which a person makes good her/his lack of visionary experience. Thus madness becomes enabling because it is hostile to static, discrete forms, juxtaposes incompatible elements and resists fixity. In its province both temporal and spatial systems dissolve. Notions of unified and consistent character are broken. Language, spoken and

written, becomes incoherent. It coalesces past, present and future and allows dialogues with the dead.

In many of their novels Lessing and Morrison project madness as a peculiar, creative manifestation of the 'abnormal' consciousness.

Lessing had close contact with abnormal consciousness in her own life. Her parents were, in varying degrees, mentally unstable. In an interview with Roberta Rubenstein she discloses:

> I have spent nearly thirty years in close contact with mental illnesses, first through various brands of analysts and therapists and psychiatrists, and then through people who were 'mad' in various ways and with whom I had close contact. And still have. All this was not by any conscious choice on my part: it just happened, presumably because of some unconscious need of my own. . . . I have always been close to crazy people. My parents were mildly, in their own ways. My father was done in by the first world

> war, from which he never really recovered, and, mother had, what is known as an unfortunate upbringing, her mother dying when she was three or so, and she never could get over that. Both were acutely neurotic people. But I do not regard this as any personal fate, far from it, I believe that the world gets madder and madder, and when I say that, it is not rhetorical or because the words sound attractively eccentric (3).

In Lessing's fiction, madness acts as a formulation of the dialectic between mind and world. The recognition that the conventional definition of sanity excludes the visionary angle of perception forces Lessing to resort to using madness in her fiction which, according to her, provides the possibility of heightened awareness. Madness, in her fiction, is perceived as the gnosis that transcends the apparent contradictions produced by conventional logical thinking.

This central concern of Lessing's in exploring the abnormal consciousness becomes obvious with her

protagonists shifting their emphasis from the personal to the collective aspects of consciousness when they break through (not 'break down') the lighter sides of their selves to the darker sides.

As early a novel as *The Grass is Singing* (1950) shows the material world of Mary Turner positing sexual and racial problems which become catalysts for her inner fragmentation. She responds to the polarisations of reality through madness. The resulting breakdown emphasizes the disjunction between self and the world through the fact that oppression and alienation have both political and psychological modalities, both of which are incontrovertible.

It is remarkable that the seeds for many of Lessing's later preoccupations are to be found in her first novel *The Grass is Singing*. The process of mental break down which is Lessing's major preoccupation in many of her other novels, especially in *Briefing for a Descent into Hell* originates with *The Grass is Singing:*

> One also finds the central cluster of her ideas concerning the abnormal consciousness: fragmentation, self

> division, breakdown, the subjective distortions of perception and implicit questions about the relationship between internal and external perspectives of events. Chaos is confronted both as a construct of the external world and as that of internal reality. (Rubenstein 17)

In *The Four-Gated City* (1969) Martha catches a glimpse of the possibilities of the human future in madness. There is, she discovers, a community of madness, greater and more satisfying than the community of Marxism where she had once looked for emotional brotherhood.

The Grass is Singing is the story of a muddling incapacity to cope with the African and the colonial experience. This novel was based on a little newspaper report that Lessing found, to be a corroboration of the gossip she had heard as a child about a white woman, a farmer on some nearby farm and her relationship with a black cook boy, and the unease of the white people discussing it.

Lessing's interest in Jungian theories is evident in *The Grass is Singing*. Jung attached great importance to the

non-rational, and in Lessing's novels and short stories break down and madness are seen as states of great potential. Lessing's views on madness are very similar to those of R.D. Laing, who sees 'madness' as a normal reaction to the fragmented state of the world, and considers it as the beginning of self-healing. In *The Grass is Singing* madness does lead Mary Turner, the heroine, literally to death. The parochialism of the white settlers becomes one of the major thematic preoccupations in the novel. The white settlers, despite their disparate interests and inclinations, band together to show a united front to the black population. This situation is exposed by Lessing in *The Grass is Singing.* Here the white solidarity is depicted as straining to a breaking point.

The Grass is Singing is set in a remote Rhodesian farm and opens with a newspaper account of the death of Mary Turner at the hands of her black servant, Moses.

> Mary Turner, wife of Richard Turner, a farmer at Ngesi, was found murdered on the front veranda of their homestead yesterday morning. The houseboy, who has

been arrested has confessed to the crime. No motive has been discovered. It is thought he was in search of valuables.(3)

The remainder of the novel reveals this conventional, white South African woman's interactions with the repressive social and psychological pressures of her environment.

She is in fact almost stagnant psychically. Her job as a typist by the time she is twenty years old brings her both financial and emotional independence. However, that this independence is aberrated is evident from her apparently unmoved attitude towards the death of her parents. Her peculiarities form the topic of discussion at gatherings. Her situation becomes all the more incomprehensible to the conventional people as she is thirty and neither married nor in the feminist movements. Although she has a genuine " aversion towards the personal things like love and passion" (42), she marries Dick Turner, the first person who offers her love. But that proves to be frigid relationship where " two people, both twisted and wrong in their depths, are well matched, making each other miserable in the way they

need" (58).

Her desperate marriage leaves her devoid of the stimulation of town life and the responsibility of a job. She is submissive to Dick's romantically idealized notions of marriage but feels nothing. The novel describes her as being "able maternally to bestow the gift of herself on this humble stranger, and remain untouched" (57).

Mary's self-alienation and self-contempt trigger her psychic break down. She objectifies her self-hatred in Moses, her black servant boy. She makes unreasonable demands on him for fear of losing control over him. But dreams haunt her with images of her submission to Moses' control and kindness.

Moses is as impersonal and emotionally detached as Mary is. But in him Mary considers this as defiance, as a punishment for which she whips him across his face. However his continued indifference shakes her faith in her own authority and she begins to lapse into apathetic silences in the middle of sentences, weep at the smallest provocation and neglect house-hold duties. Roberta Rubenstein observes that,

> The relationship between Mary and Moses depicts in microcosm several forms of power relationships. On the political level it can duplicate the imbalance between the oppressive white minority and the black majority in South Africa. More suggestively, on the physical level it reflects the shifting tensions of sexual dominance and submission between male and female. On the psychological level it dramatises the splits within the fragmenting, splitting personality. (*The Novelistic Vision of Doris Lessing* 21-22)

Mary's distracted mind becomes unwillingly involved with Moses. She loses her sense of time. Dick becomes almost an unreal, dream-like person for her. At this point the narrative begins to lose its objectivity.

Mary's experience is explored by measuring her subjective perception against the other characters' perceptions of her behaviour. As Mary's involuntary involvement with Moses progresses, her mind meanders through

reality and unreality losing all connections with chronological time. At the juncture when Dick falls ill and Moses assumes responsibility for Dick's care, Lessing shifts from the objective narration of the earlier parts of the novel into a subjective point of view, describing events as if perceived by a consciousness highly 'distorted' by emotional anguish. For Mary, now, the sole reality becomes the ubiquitous presence of Moses, and with the increased obsessive and distorted nature of her perceptions, Moses becomes dreamlike, spectral and unreal. All male figures in the novel become condensed in Moses.

Lessing then juxtaposes the conventional reality represented by the Turners' neighbour Charlie Slatter and Mary's disintegrating inner reality. It is through Slatter that we see the inverted master-servant power relations. A second, external, perspective is provided by Toni Marston, whom Charlie sends to oversee Mary. Marston describes Mary's condition as a "complete nervous breakdown" (217) and says that she is "mad as Hatter" (221). As for Mary, she seems to seek compensation for the unsatisfactory relationship with her husband and the existing social

power relations through her interactions with Moses. Later Marston elaborates that Mary "behaves simply as if she lives in a world of her own, where other people's standards don't count" and wonders " but then, what is madness, but a refuge, a retreating from the world?" (221). This position of uncertainty, of the vague demarcation between sanity and insanity, has been Lessing's concern in her later fiction. However, Lessing makes it clear that it is not only Mary's but the others' perceptions too that are 'distortive'.

In the final section, Mary's abnormal consciousness is the narrator. At the culmination of her break down, Mary, now completely released from psychic tensions, feels a heightened connection with everything around her. This harmony is perhaps the result of the removal of boundaries between the conscious and unconscious, inner and outer being, sanity and insanity.

Mary walks out into the bush and experiences in the midst of her final thought, the thick bush closing in upon her in the figure of Moses as " the trees advanced in a rush, like beasts and the thunder was the noise of their coming" (243).

Mary Turner's mental break down is at once an index of personal disintegration and the abnormalities in the power relations informed by society. Her psychic reality transforms the outer reality for her and complements her vision of the world.

In all the subjective chapters in *The Grass is Singing*, the point of view is that of the abnormal consciousness, the totally subjective experience of psychic distortion of perception and dissolution of the boundary lines between internal and external events. The ultimate goal of the interior journey is an escape from outer chaos, a 'visionary' exit from the persuasive social break down that the protagonist experiences. It is an attempt to project a new form of order. For this Lessing appropriates the conventions of fantasy and speculative fiction with her innovative adaptations of the narrative form.

The thematic end -- Mary's death -- which is the beginning of the novel, is the only situation, where the narrative voice is a unified proclamation. In an insane situation only madness provides insight, wholeness and unity in the novel.

The fictional formulation of psychic break down of

Mary Turner in *The Grass is Singing* anticipates various acute and disorienting psychic experiences, which border on madness in many of Lessing's characters in her later novels. Her explorations of the abnormal consciousness as manifested in madness and psychic break down often emphasize the relationship between private and social fragmentation.

Anna Wulf in *The Golden Notebook* confesses to her psychotherapist that she wants to make divisions within her, in order to be able to "separate in myself what is old and cyclic, the recurring history, the myth, from what is new, what I feel or think that might be new " (404). A similar breakdown and the unconventional mental experience which led to a reintegration of personality can be seen in the younger Martha Quest of the early volumes of *Children of Violence* series. Ideological and sexual antitheses precipitate Julia Barr's self-division in *Retreat to Innocence*. Thomas Stern's psychosis in *Landlocked* stresses the connection between the dissolution of the self and mystic perceptions. Martha Quest's schizophrenic visions and her explorations of the meanings of Thomas Stern's and Lynda Coleridge's psychotic perceptions become more

comprehensible when seen as evolutionary stages in developing the modes of spiritual perception which are voiced more vehemently in *Briefing for a Descent into Hell*.

In *The Golden Notebook*, the separate notebooks, representing as they do Anna's attempts to compartmentalise her life, prove to be finally inadequate, and Anna who tends them, is sterile and blocked. It is only the Golden Notebook, a synthesis of the other four notebooks, which is finally operative, and the Golden Notebook comes into being only because Anna and Saul Green have experienced a kind of collapse together. As Lessing has pointed out in her preface to the novel, the breakdown that the two characters experience is in effect a breaking down of categories, a breaking down into each other:

> They . . . break through the false patterns they have made of their pasts, the patterns and formulas they have made to shore up themselves and each other, dissolve. They hear each other's thoughts, recognize each other in themselves. Saul Green, the man who has

> been envious and destructive of Anna, now supports her, advises her, gives her the theme for her next book, Free Woman . . . . In the inner Golden Notebook, which is written by both of them, you can no longer distinguish between what is Saul and what is Anna, and between them and the other people in the book. (*GN* 7-8)

The theme of *Briefing for a Descent into Hell* is adumbrated in Lessing's earlier work, *The Golden Notebook*, in Ella's idea of writing a story about a man whose 'sense of reality' has gone, and because of it has 'a deeper sense of reality than normal people' (458). Structurally also, *Briefing* is closer in conception to the experimental form of *The Golden Notebook*, with its inversion of chronology and the multiple perspective that reinforces the subjectivity of point of view. However, *Briefing* goes beyond *The Golden Notebook* in that it initiates new formal and narrative shifts in Lessing's fiction.

Lessing describes her *Briefing* as "a mad, dream-like book, completely different from anything I have done

before" (*Putting the Questions Differently* 107). It is a novel which has madness woven into both the thematic and formal levels. Here Lessing concentrates on some of the principal concerns of the contemporary literary consciousness like the nature of the self, the dehumanising aspects of society, and the inadequacy of language to effect any meaningful communication between the fissured self and the hostile world.

In *Briefing,* Lessing describes the experience of Charles Watkins, a professor of literary classics at Cambridge. He is in a state of mental break down accompanied by amnesia and a loss of identity. He is labelled mad and put into a mental hospital. Lessing categorises *Briefing* as " inner space fiction" which "casts off realism as a form of fiction" (*Putting* 50). *Briefing* shows a remarkable empathy for the broken down psyche by presenting Charles Watkins's experience of a visionary archetypal world of myth, his treatment at the hands of conventional psychiatrists, and his subsequent 'recovery' into the mean, narrow, self-denying world of the 'sane'. As Joyce Carol Oates puts it,

One of the far reaching consequences

> of Doris Lessing's *Briefing* will be to relate the 'mystical' experience to ordinary life, to show that the apparently sick --the 'legally insane'-- members of our society may, in fact, be in touch with a deeper, more poetic, more human reality than the apparently healthy. (36)

Several critics, including Marian Vlastos and Rubenstein have pointed out that mental voyage of Charles Watkins has parallels with a case-study described by Laing in *The Politics of Experience* (179). In his book, Laing records a real psychotic episode of ten days in the life of a man called Jesse Watkins. Laing's description of the potential of this journey, which he calls 'a ten day voyage' has experiences quite similar to those undergone by Lessing's character Charles Watkins.

Jesse Watkins, during his psychotic travel, discovers that he has supernatural powers and he feels that, "I had sort of --tapped powers that in some vague way I had felt I had, or everybody had"(179). Laing calls this a situation of " hyper sanity, not sub-sanity" (180). Lessing must have

found this congruent with Sufist philosophy -- with which she had a deep involvement -- with its emphasis on the individual's capacity for transcendence.

Watkins's journey changes his perceptions of time and space. The first major section of the novel shows the light shining through the cracked mind of the protagonist, and, the remainder of the novel provides a partial explanation for the crack. Laing has remarked that, "the cracked mind of the schizophrenic may let in light which does not enter the intact minds of many sane people whose minds are closed" (188).

For the first and only time in Lessing's whole fictional enterprise, the protagonist of this novel is a male. Charles Watkins's intense desire for unification and his recognition of separation envisioned through a series of metaphoric or symbolic journeys shape Lessing's central vision in this novel. Her conception of both socio-political reality and personal development is punctuated by the protagonist's mental aberrations. As the structure of reality evolves from social and political realms and converges on the psychological level, the structure of the novel correspondingly incorporates the motifs and

narrative patterns associated with myth, romance and fantasies.

The unnamed seafarer begins the narrative exploring his own consciousness. The alternating sections correspond to ways of perceiving the psychic crisis of the central character both from within his own consciousness and from without. Accordingly, the first long portion is narrated primarily from the more immediate and subjective focus of the perceiving consciousness while the remaining portions are composed primarily of letters and dialogues from the outer world. However, the narrative resists compartmentalisation of any sort with doctors' evaluations being juxtaposed with the directly recorded subjective experiences of the protagonist, thereby emphasising perceptual anti-thesis. Rosemary Baines's long letter describing her ideas on education and related matters forms a major section of the narrative. But as Rubenstein contends, many of the ideas detailed in the letter of Baines -- who is an acquaintance from one of Watkins's lecture audience -- reappear in altered form as images or events in Watkins's inner space journey narrated earlier in the novel (190). Watkins's exploratory unfolding of his consciousness is periodically interrupted by the doctors'

observations on their patient. It is interesting to note that it is when Watkins is most awake and aware within his own mental experience that he is considered most deeply asleep from the point of view of the medical observers.

Throughout the novel Lessing provides the subjective experience of Watkins's abnormal consciousness first, and only subsequently furnishes the context, the details of which have been translated into the particular images of his journey. That the inner journey itself is both a reflection of and an effort to heal the division is seen to be the central assumption of the novel. Such seemingly paradoxical inferences are scattered throughout the novel.

In Watkins's psychic travels in his amnesiac state in the first part of the novel he meets mythic figures and identifies himself with them. His briefing with cosmic spirits like Merk Ury and Minna Erva to save the troubled planet is a parody of the great fabulations in Greek classics. This perspective provides the writer with the narrative liberties of science fiction. Amnesia is a central motif in the literature of the fantastic. Watkins's

psychic journey is interrupted by doctor X's efforts to restore him to his pre-amnesiac identity. But unknown to Doctor X the journey is soon resumed when Watkins recalls his war-time experiences in response to doctor Y's suggestion. This section is pure fantasy. It is neither 'realistic' nor, from the perspective of Watkins's real past life, 'true'. The passionate account of Miles Bovey's death is later confirmed to be false. He is still alive and Watkins has never seen action in Yugoslavia, the location of his recollection. Instead, these events are closer to Bovey's own war experience.

A major preoccupation of the novel is with language. It is no more a transparent, meaningful medium of expression. Charles Watkins is sensitive to language even in the most disoriented state of mind. He broods over its associations and possibilities; " Last week. Last when? That was no weak, that was my wife" (89). And, " I can taste salt from the sea. From the desert. The deserted sea", and again, " The eye that would measure the pace of sand horses, as I watch the rolling gallop sea horses would be an eye indeed. Aye Aye. I"(114). This word play ostensibly a part of his derangement, functions rather to

suggest meanings beyond the discursive.

It is highly significant that just before his 'break down' Charles had begun to stammer badly, and finally had abandoned lecturing. The recurring sense of the inadequacy of language and the system of logic which undergirds it, are scattered throughout the book. His broken self no more obeys the confines of language. Later in the novel the reader understood that Watkins had once given lectures on the education of children. But now he is reluctant even to talk with the medical staff: "I gotta use words when I talk to you. . . ."(162). When the nurse tells him that Doctor X will be in later that afternoon, he asks -- " in what"? He is particularly sensitive to the sounds of the words as well:

> Fuddled. Fuddddlled. Fudddled. Fudd
> . . . that word sounds like what it
> says. That's strange. Words . . . sounds
> . . . a dull heavy word.(183)

Charles is particularly irritated with the compulsive attempts to compartmentalise experience, using language.

> Why do you keep calling me Professor?
> Professor Charles Watkins, 15 Acacia

Road, Brink, Near Cambridge.

But I don't want that. I won't accept that.

I am afraid you have no other choice, Professor. We know that's who you are.

But I know I am not.

Or is it that you are beginning to remember though you don't want to admit it?

Why do you say *or*? *And* is more like it.

It's funny. I've just noticed it. People say either, or, this, or that, because of the thud, thud, thud, thud, fudd, fudd, in or out, black and white, yes and no, one and two, the either or comes from that, the heat, the fudd fudd in the blood, but isn't either or at all, it's and , and, and, and, and. (127)

The index of Watkins's psychic wholeness is his perception of the fundamental unity of all things, of the interrelatedness of matter and spirit in every dimension of

the cosmos. The real madness of humanity, he comprehends, is the failure to attain that unity, instead of pursuing the division as is shown in the 'either-or' condition of language.

> The world of ideology and structure is an either/ or world; Charles, however, inhabits at least in part, a both/and world, a realm of existence free from the strictures of closed systems. Language is such a system; if not completely closed, at least relatively so. And, Charles is conscious of this limitation of language as a system, its inability to get at the reality it symbolises. (Ryf 196)

In spite of Watkins's photographic memory, which is later attested to by his own colleague, the narrative employs throughout the novel a scrambled chronology which is necessitated by his amnesiac state and which is essential to the novel's formal aberrations. The narrative shifts its emphases regularly from cosmic to social time and vice versa.

One of the dominant images of *Briefing for a Descent into Hell* is that of the circle. When the reader first enters Watkins's unbridled consciousness, he is "careening through the sea" and going "around and around and around" (7). His journey, his desire for transcendence is governed by the circular moon. For, it is during the full moon that the 'Crystal' will land to take him off. "Formally, the movement towards a higher plane of mystical awareness suggests the ascent motif of romance myth"(Rubenstein 179). This is thematised by the arrival of the 'Crystal'. Three types of movements punctuate Watkins's spiritual gnosis -- ascent, descent and the linear movement. An archetypal white bird also carries him on a circular flight away from and back to the city. The white bird stands guard, protecting Watkins from the rapacious rats, dogs and monkeys, whose fighting has contaminated the city. His journey by sea and through Eden forest brings him to this city. The descent of the gods is also denoted by a circular movement. Of all the three kinds of movements, it is the descent that pervades the novel. Watkins, one of the descended gods, (he identifies himself with one) is de-haloed by society, here represented by

the hospital world. Descent is also evident in Watkins's archetypal journey through the forest and this is analogous to the journey through the timeless and unfamiliar realms of consciousness. Finally, the Crystal, which had hitherto provided Watkins with a vision of unity and harmony, also descends, leaving him to his inevitable destiny.

Formally the narrative reverses from the pattern of ascent to spiritual gnosis to that of descent, a move towards disruption.

> Sucked into sound, sucked into sea, a swinging sea, boom, shhh, boooom, shhhh, boooom . . . thud, thud, thud . . . one two, and the three is me, the three is me, THE THREE IS ME. I in the dark, I in pulsing dark, crouched , I holding on, clutching tight, boooom, shhhh, boooom, shhh, rocked, rocking, somewhere behind the gate, somewhere in front of the door, and a dark red clotting light and pressure and pain and then OUT into a flat white light, where shapes move

and things flash and glitter. (148)

To the doctors this descent is to the 'normal' state, for Watkins, he is in the abnormal state, one which lacks spiritual awareness.

In spite of the circles and closures in the narrative, the novel remains open ended, expressing the uncertainties inherent in the subject and mode of narration. Charles Watkins seems to have been 'cured' towards the end of the novel. His concluding letters seem quite 'normal'. However, Watkins is bereft of his inner visions and is returned to the more insane world of our customary habitation. As an ardent believer in Sufi wisdom, Lessing is not likely to leave her protagonist 'normal' after the psychiatric treatment. Sufism advocates the inadequacy of psychology as a method of studying total being, the tyranny of language, the fallacy of judging by appearances, the presence of hidden meanings, the emphasis upon inner experience and the possibility of direct intuitive knowledge of reality (Shah, Idries 18). Lessing hails the Sufi belief for its stress on one's ability to be in this world, but not of it. To quote Ryf,

We have seen, towards the end of the

> novel, that Watkins does not hesitate to borrow and claim as his own, in response to cryptic inner urgings, a portion of the war time biography of a friend. It seems equally possible, then, although in response to inner demands, that he might announce himself as 'cured' in order to maintain his inner vision free from further assault from society, to be operational in the 'real' world, while at the same time also maintaining the freedom and richness of his inner life, here symbolised by his archetypal journey in all its ramifications. He might be calling into play those weapons which , Stephen Dedalus proclaimed as the artist's defence against the world: silence, exile, cunning. He might, in short, be in this world but not finally of it. (200)

The opposition to and rejection of all sorts of

categorisation and the recognition of the primacy of experiential insights and values as against abstract knowledge and norms can be seen as Lessing's movement beyond dominant ideology. Such departures may be seen to inform Lessing's novels both at the formal and at the thematic levels.

"*Briefing*", says Lessing, "was an attempt to suggest what in fact the experience of the non-rational could be, and the discomforts that it causes the establishment" (*Putting* 50). Lessing seems to be showing that break down or collapse is a desperate and agonised attempt of the self to resist victimisation by the very structures that have entrapped and fragmented it. The new-found potential of madness to effect unity through resistance thus expresses the author's conception of and response to the socio-political realities and their impact on personal development.

However, madness is not as imperative in Doris Lessing's works as it is in those of Toni Morrison. Mary Turner, Anna, and Charles Watkins resort to madness, but this is more or less a matter of their own choice, their means of interacting with the world. The narrator's

comments on the state of Anna's broken down psyche is worth quoting here:

> It occurred to her that she was going mad. This was the 'break down' she had foreseen; the 'cracking up'. Yet it did not seem to her that she was even slightly mad; but rather that people who were not as obsessed as she was with the inchoate world mirrored in the newspapers, were all out of touch with an awful necessity. Yet she knew she was mad. And while she could not prevent herself from the careful obsessed business of reading masses of print, and cutting into pieces, and pinning them all over the walls, she knew that on the day Janet came home from the school, she would become Anna, Anna, the responsible, and the obsession would go away. She knew that Janet's mother being sane and responsible was far more important than the necessity of

> understanding the world; and of course, one thing depended heavily on the other. The world would never get itself understood, be ordered by words, be 'named', unless Janet's mother remained a woman who was really able to be responsible. (*GN* 564)

Lessing's characters respond to the social paranoia by refusing to come to terms with what is considered 'normal' by society. Mary, who thrived as a town-girl , chooses to marry the rural Dick Turner. Anna, who has been a very successful writer, ventures out into the world, the disintegration of which, works to collapse her equilibrium. Charles Watkins has been an efficient professor for a long period until he loses his mental poise. In the case of Morrison's characters, they take refuge in madness in order to survive in the hostile world. These characters find their voice only when their aberrated consciousness speaks for them. This becomes a desperate attempt to make visible that which has been erased, and find a place for the dislocated and the dispossessed.

The Bluest Eye (1970) is Toni Morrison's first effort

to create what she likes to call, "a genuine black book" ("Unspeakable Things Unspoken" 3). Here, black girlhood assumes tragic dimensions when it borrows identity models from the mandates of white culture. A black girl growing up in a white culture is often forced to internalise the belief that the necessary pre-condition for receiving love and recognition is to have an aesthetically attractive appearance.

In a sense, *The Bluest Eye* is the story of the sacrifice of Pecola, a young girl who measures her own worth in terms of the idealized white standards of beauty and morality, and who goes mad consequently. Pecola spends "long hours . . . looking in the mirror, trying to discover the secret of the ugliness, the ugliness that made her ignored or despised at school, by teachers and classmates alike" (39). She, who loved blue-eyed Shirley Temples, somehow feels that if her eyes were different, she would be different.

> If she looked different, beautiful, may be Cholly would be different, and Mrs. Breedlove too. May be they would say, "why, look at pretty-eyed Pecola. We

> mustn't do bad things in front of those pretty eyes. (40)

Every night she fervently prays for blue eyes.

Cholly Breedlove, her father, gives vent to the sequence of emotions he feels for her -- revulsion, guilt, pity and love -- by deflowering her. But Pecola is not at all worried about the effect of the incestuous rape. Instead, she approaches Soaphead Church, who is a "Reader, Advisor, and Interpreter of Dreams" to seek his help in acquiring blue eyes (130). Soaphead Church thinks it is at once the most fantastic and the most logical petition he has ever received. A surge of love and understanding sweeps through him, which is quickly replaced by anger, as he is powerless to help her. Like Cholly, Soaphead also contributes to denature Pecola -- this time mentally -- by playing God's deputy and suggesting to the girl ways to attain blue eyes. He instructs her to make some offerings to God through some "simple" creatures. He tells her that the creature would be a vehicle through which He would speak. Pecola gives the food given by Soaphead Church to the dog on the porch, as instructed by him. As the dog behaves strangely, she feels assured that her wish would be

granted. She runs away believing that she will soon be granted blue eyes.

With this Pecola completely 'falls' or 'rises' to the world of madness and fantasy. She speaks to her other self, as her personality splits. She believes that she has been granted the bluest eyes in the whole world. The 'how' of Pecola's story ends here and the 'what' of her story begins with Pecola speaking in a fit of insanity.

It is significant to note that it is when she is in the world of madness that Pecola sees herself for the first time, though by then the self is a splintered one. It is then that, for the first time in the novel, Pecola finds herself in a position to speak directly. Pecola's voice becomes the narrative voice. Morrison merges Pecola's schizophrenic double-voicedness with the other narrative voices.

The result of Pecola's victimization by the community is a tragic schizophrenia, a psychotic double-voicedness. This is the outcome of her belief that she has been granted the beauty that she believes accompanies blue eyes. It becomes a psychic reality for her and the key construct upon which other parts of her world hinge.

After the rape by her father, and her encounter with the misanthropic Soaphead Church, Pecola manufactures a friend in order to validate her newfound identity. Pecola's friend scolds her for looking again and again in the mirror to see her blue eyes:

> You scared they might go away?
>
> Of course not. How can they go away?
>
> The others went away.
>
> They didn't go away. They changed.
>
> Go away. Change. What's the difference?
>
> A lot. Mr. Soaphead said they would last forever.
>
> Forever and ever amen?
>
> Yes, if you want to know. (150)

Pecola desperately tries to get her eyes accredited as the bluest and the most beautiful in the world. And, she has nobody else to turn to for this, but her new 'friend'.

> Are they very nice?
>
> Yes, very nice.
>
> Just, "very nice"?
>
> Really, truely, very nice.
>
> Really, truly, bluely nice? (151)

Now, everything in the outside world, which hurts a so-called normal person, is quite comfortable for Pecola. Nothing is too dazzling, too dangerous, too piercing to hurt her. She has become that much beautiful, and so, formidable.

> Well, let's go then, . . . ow!
>
> What's the matter?
>
> The sun is too bright. It hurts my eyes.
>
> Not mine. I don't even blink. Look. I can look right at the sun.
>
> Don't do that.
>
> Why not? It doesn't hurt. I don't even have to blink. (151)

Everybody, including Pecola's mother Pauline, tries to avoid looking at Pecola. They take her madness to be an outcome of the incestuous rape. But Pecola feels that they are pretending that they don't see her blue eyes, out of jealousy. She regrets that she did not find out her real friend earlier. She is ecstatic when she is assured of the blueness and beauty of her eyes.

> Prettier than the sky?
>
> Oh, yes, much prettier than the sky.

> Prettier than the Alice and Jerry story book eyes?
>
> Oh, yes, prettier than the Alice and Jerry story book eyes.
>
> They are bluer, aren't they?
>
> Oh, yes, much bluer.
>
> Bluer than Joanna's?
>
> Much bluer than Joanna's.
>
> And bluer than Michelena's?
>
> Much bluer than Michelena's. (153)

Shadrack in *Sula* is placed in the same relation to the community of Bottom as Pecola is to her community in *The Bluest Eye*. The people of Bottom can gauge how normal and beautiful they are by measuring themselves against Shadrack's insanity and ugliness. A man who comes down the street ringing a cowbell and dangling a hanging rope on the third day of January every year, cannot be a legitimate representative of rationality.

> For Morrison, the psychological, like the social and the sexual, is also historical. In a novel whose opening describes the levelling of a black

> neighbourhood and its transformation into a golf course is the psychological equivalent of annihilating social upheaval. (Willis 320-321)

Shadrack suffered shell shock when, during battle, he turned his head a little to the right and saw the face of a soldier near him fly off. Before he could register shock, the rest of the soldier's head disappeared under the inverted soup bowl of his helmet. But "stubbornly, taking no direction from the brain, the body of the headless soldier ran on, with energy and grace, ignoring altogether the drip and slide of brain tissue down its back" (17). When he is admitted to a veteran's hospital, his aberrations at first make it impossible for him to feed himself. The large tin plate carrying food with its neat balance of three triangles soothes him, transferring some of its equilibrium to him. But when he tries to assimilate that balance into himself by putting his hands into them, his hands "began to grow in higgledy-piggledy fashion like Jack's beanstalk all over the tray and the bed" (18).

To him the world ceases to have an inherent order. After leaving the hospital, his haven for more than a year,

only eight days of which he can fully recollect, he reaches Bottom with "no past, no language, no tribe, no source, no address book, no comb, no pencil, no clock, no pocket handkerchief, no rug, no bed, no can opener, no faded postcard, no soap, no key, no tobacco pouch, no soiled underwear, and nothing, nothing to do" (23). He is deprived of all the markers of social identity. Without such possessions and the social and economic standing implied by them, he attains the status of a mythic character. This analogy is drawn further with his celebration of National Suicide Day. On the third day of every new year, he walks through Bottom with a cowbell and a hangman's rope, calling the people together, telling them that this is their only chance to kill themselves or each other; and, thereby promising liberation from fear-- not of death, but of its unexpectedness. As time passes along, people take less notice of " these January thirds, for, in fact, they had absorbed it into their thoughts, into their language, into their life" (27). Someone said to her friend that her labour pains started on Suicide Day, and someone else didn't want to be married on National Suicide Day because she did not like to listen to cowbells while the

wedding was going on.

Shadrack establishes his own order against the higgledy piggledy chaos of the outer world. Keith E. Byerman remarks that Shadrack's National Suicide Day "is intended as a prophylaxis against disorder, to the terrifyingly unstable conditions of existence" (258). Reversing the Bible's characterisation of Shadrack as a man whose faith enabled him to escape the commands of authority, "Morrison's mad ritualist is consciousness blasted and terrified into non-sense by the awesome capitalist disorder of war" (Ordonez 11). He is the leader of an ordering ritual, but the order he strives to establish remains unsanctioned by society. Significantly, his private neurosis becomes part of the social order.

As Morrison herself has said, it is Shadrack who serves to 'cement' the community. He is the isolated individual whose initial role is played outside the ambit of the community, but who eventually emerges with the history of the black neighbourhood of Bottom ("Memory" 4).

The community of Bottom cannot completely disregard with Shadrack's trauma. On the National Suicide Day of

1941, some members of the community impulsively join Shadrack's parade. As they reach the edge of the town, they come to a tunnel, which, because of discrimination in employment, was built without African American labour. In a spontaneous act of rebellion, they begin to destroy the tunnel they were forbidden to build:

> They did not mean to go in, to actually go down into the lip of the tunnel, but in their need to kill it all, all of it, to wipe from the face of the earth the work of the thin-armed Virginia boys, the bull-necked Greeks, and the knife faced men who waved the leaf-dead promise, they went . . . too deep, too far. (205)

This frenzied response against the denial of full participation to African Americans in American society -- the only one of its kind in the whole novel -- is spear-headed by the man who had suffered through more than forty years of disorientation.

Shadrack is the first character that the reader encounters in *Sula*. Like a chorus character he, along with

Nel, ends the tale too:

> Shadrack and Nel moved in opposite directions, each one thinking separate thoughts about the past. The distance between them increased as they both remembered gone things. (220)

It is important to note that Morrison uses Shadrack, the insane prophet-like figure of annihilation, to frame the story of disintegration of Medallion's black Bottom. As psychic aberration opens up all closures, *Sula* also echoes a resistance to closure. The novel ends with Nel crying full throat:

> "O lord, Sula," she cried "girl, girl, girl, girlgirlgirl". It was a fine cry - loud and long - but it had no bottom and it had no top, just circles and circles of sorrow. (221)

By ending *Sula* in 1965, some years before the time of the beginning of the novel, Morrison invites readers to come full circle, but before enclosing, the narrative begins again, re-experiencing the whole tale in terms of Nel's final thoughts about the community. Readers who

retrospectively span the scenes of this remarkably visual novel will experience Shadrack as a lonely, alienated character. But as the only word uttered by him in the novel -- excepting of course his curses and promises on the National Suicide Day -- shows, he is "always" present. Through his reply "always" he is answering a question that Sula had not asked (85). He is the only witness of the involvement of Sula and Nel in Chicken Little's death. It is he who watches as Bottom slowly gives way to golf courses and fancy houses.

To a reader of realistic narratives, it may seem conventional on the part of Morrison to reveal Shadrack's inscrutable and incoherent self through omniscient narration. But Morrison's omniscient narrator is devoid of any kind of narrative authority that is traditionally attributed to her. For instance, readers are never allowed to know how National Suicide Day became a success in spite of Shadrack's unwillingness to observe it that year. They are only given the picture of people going deeper and deeper into the tunnel, while Shadrack passively stands high upon the bank having forgotten his song and rope.

As Hoffarth-Zelloe says, *Sula* challenges the

traditional western notion of a unified self by presenting Shadrack as the most aberrated, yet most effective character, and by offering the readers a journey to the epicentre of the human soul, depicting the post-modernist thrust on multiple, incoherent selves (71).

While Lessing's characters become insane by resisting the society's conventions, sometimes by carrying them to their logical extreme, Morrison's characters are victims who personify their society's obsessions. In both ways madness is an alternative to cultural hegemony and its domination. Both Lessing and Morrison consider madness as a most expressive analogy for the various aberrations of contemporary life.

Orchestrated Points of Narrative: Narrators and View

P.S. Jaya “Fiction, form and resistance: A study of the novels of Doris Lessing and Toni Morrison” Thesis. Department of English , University of Calicut, 2001

Chapter II Orchestrated Narrative: Narrators and Points of View

The narrational strategies in the novels of Doris Lessing and Toni Morrison undercut the traditional kinds of authority in which narrative forms are usually grounded. The traditional authoritative modes of narration presuppose the feasibility of absolute knowledge. The consequent "sin of innocence" on the part of both the narrator and the reader is the target of the attack of post-modern writers (Rainwater 97). The key element of the authorial identity of these writers derives from their apparent need to expose and eradicate the naïve assumption that one is able to know the truth. It is a postmodern gesture of resistance, which makes a strategic attack on the conjecture that literature or any other form of human communication carries a reliable and unperfidious message to its 'benefactors' from the obscure and complex realms of both consciousness and the social world.

Both Lessing and Morrison consistently try to formulate a system of values in their fiction, which suits their experience of contemporary reality. They are highly sensitive to the complexities of human existence. Their novels do "certainly seem to vacillate on an array of important social and moral issues, like the question of whether the problems of family violence, incest, madness and murder stem from "pathological hatred or pathological love" (Rainwater 96). This is not to say that they are unwittingly revealing their own uncertainties through their fiction. Rather, their management of the narrative reveals that their narrators and characters are the loci of various kinds of uncertainty that form the main focus of their fiction.

Their use of the omniscient narrative point of view to anchor a narrative which is unconventional and uncertain, may seem perplexing on a superficial reading. But a penetrating study will reveal that the omniscient narrative voices are built up only to be pulled down. Omniscient narration is used as a ploy to attack the moral and epistemological authority that such narrators usually embody.

Lessing's use of the orchestrated narrative design is characterized by disrupted chronology, splintered plots, decentred accountability and the disruptive voices of narration. She leaves the readers panicky about the loss of a centre. No sooner is a frame developed than the point of view shifts belying the text's claim to transparency. This continual frame shifting process is most evident in *The Memoirs of a Survivor*.

The reader, it could be supposed, is led to witness the disintegration of the predominant forms of story telling through the writers' own deteriorating faith in conventional narrative forms as these forms prove to be inadequate in their fiction. In the works of Lessing and Morrison the relationship between the writer and the reader is redefined as the narrators gradually renege on the authoritative pronouncements they make. Thus both the narrator and the reader are simultaneously deprived of the complacency of form and knowledge that is usually encoded, enclosed, and managed within the particular form of the conventional text. The disruptive narrative construction works to undermine the text's superficial representation. It elicits a reading which subordinates the claims of

realism, including that of the authenticating use of narrative viewpoints and the dynamic interaction of the parts within the text as a whole. This dismantling design acknowledges the insufficiency of any one voice. It posits rather, that knowledge is constructed by the many and that reading is a process of active reshaping by the readers.

Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook* is a case in point. Anna is an author who suffers from a writer's block, a divorcee, a mother, an intellectually and sexually free woman. She uses four different coloured notebooks to record her various reflections. When her friend Molly's son Tommy is overwhelmed by the chaos implied by the four notebooks, he attempts suicide, blinding himself. The guilt Anna experiences over Tommy's act estranges her from writing in the notebooks. She papers her walls with conflicting newspaper accounts of man's inhumanity to man. As Anna moves around this room, "matching statement with statement, one set of words with another" (*GN* 653), the narrator takes the reader along to compare statement with statement in the closed comforts of *The Golden Notebook* and to find the nature of reality and the truth about life and

consciousness, just as the author sees it. Unable to break through the repeated pattern of her unsatisfactory relations with men and her writer's block, Anna goes on alone, turning to social work. Molly who resigns herself to marrying another rich businessman like her ex-husband Richard, makes compromises with life.

The initial Free Women section is followed by excerpts from the Black, Red, Yellow and Blue notebooks that cover the years 1950-'57 and move backwards in time. It is as though explaining the past would provide the background to an understanding of the present. Though the excerpts mostly date from the beginning of the 1950s some recount earlier events or fictional ones.

The narrative part which makes up the first Black Notebook is mostly expressed in the first person point of view of Anna Wolf. The Black Notebook intermittently recounts Anna's memories of her experiences in Africa and presents excerpts from Anna's first novel *Frontiers of War,* parodied as *Forbidden Love*. However, unlike the first person narrative of Anna's memories, *Frontiers of War* is presented through an omniscient point of view. The Black Notebook also records sources, reviews, parodies, business

matters relating to real and fictional events, and contains newspaper cuttings.

The Red Notebook also mixes different points of view. It records Anna's involvement with the British Communist Party, and includes newspaper cuttings, conscious and unconscious parodies written by herself and others in the Party.

The Yellow Notebook includes serious attempts at fiction and parodies of several styles; but it chiefly contains a novel called *The Shadow of the Third*, which Anna does not intend for publication, for she thinks this too suggests chaos. Its protagonist Ella is writing a novel about a young man who commits suicide. Ella and her friend Julia are "free women", fictional versions of the archetype -- the creative individual -- of which Anna and Molly are the real versions. Through this distanced, fictional projection of herself, Anna expresses her painful relationships with men, her death wish, her creative sensibility, and creation though blurred, of a shadow of a third person -- the person she wants to be. The Yellow Notebook ends with outlines for five short novels and twelve short stories.

The Blue Notebook is in the form of a diary which holds Anna's account of her personal life: her relation with her child Janet, and her relation with friends, associates and lovers. This notebook too includes parodies and newspaper accounts.

The pattern of a Free Women section being followed by a section each of the four notebooks is repeated four times. Throughout this narrative the reader is shuttled between the omniscient and the first person points of view. Finally the Golden Notebook section appears, written wholly through Anna's perspective. Though she has since childhood played 'the game of relating the microcosm to the macrocosm' Anna feels that she has not been able to capture the truth or reality of private life or its relation to public life in any of the other notebooks as she has been able to do in this one. Anna laughs at the words scribbled by Saul Green on the front page of the Golden Notebook, the old schoolboy's curse:

> Whoever he be who looks in this
>
> He shall be cursed,
>
> That is my wish.
>
> Saul Green, his book (!!!). (GN 528)

Anna decides to make it her own:

> I'll pack away the blue Notebook with the others. I'll pack away the four notebooks. I'll start a new notebook, all of myself in one book. (GN 528)

Only in the Golden Notebook does the omniscient narrator make no attempt to peep in; as Anna wishes, it is absolutely her own.

The Golden Notebook anticipates *The Memoirs of a Survivor* as far as the techniques of narration are concerned. *The Memoirs of a Survivor* is radically innovative in the sense that it combines the possibilities of science fiction and historical narrative in order to achieve the desired effect of subversion.

Perhaps it is *The Memoirs of a Survivor* that relies the most heavily on unconventional narrative techniques and therefore has the most disorienting effect on the readers. Indeed, one of the most striking attributes of this novel is that it leaves the reader with the sensation that she/he is floating out of the comfort of a frame.

At the beginning of *The Memoirs of a Survivor* the un-named narrator renders an account of her experiences in

'the dying year' of a great city somewhere in England. "Her memoirs record, in terms of a particular life, how the institutions of a technological and bureaucratic society collapse from inner corruption, and how mankind, in the midst of cultural rot finds itself faced with two alternatives -- death or radical change" (Draine 54). This part of the novel is an extrapolation, which demonstrates the grave implications of the present reality. The scene is one of complete anarchy: bureaucracy feeds on the population, goods and services are rarely available, all practises are illegal, gangs of youths wander along the streets in animal-like packs and pilfer. Vague illnesses and diseases, reminding one of those suffered by the Coleridges and their acquaintances in *The Four-Gated City* abound.

As the novel unfolds, a man comes to the apartment in which the narrator lives and entrusts her with a twelve-year old girl, Emily. The time of the events narrated is not given. Towards the middle of the narrative, the unnamed narrator declares: "this is a history, after all, and I hope a truthful one" (110). This declaration labelling the narrative as 'history' poses questions of genre, narrative

form and chronology. True, these are the memoirs of a survivor of some catastrophe, but throughout the narrative a sense of the future lingers. Thematically the time at which the incidents occur may be inferred as taking place sometime in the future. The survivor of these barbaric times invents events as much as she recalls them from her memory. *The Memoirs of a Survivor* can thus best be called a 'chronicle of the future'. Alvin Sullivan says that at a rational or realistic level, the novel appears to belong to the genre of future history or science fiction (158).

The meaning of *The Memoirs of a Survivor* inheres in the reader's experience of the dialectical world portrayed in the novel, of the fragmented society and the inner consciousness, and of the form through which such fragments communicate and ultimately cohere. It is vision of a future time when civilization will decline into barbarism. The novel opens with the anonymous narrator brooding over the chaos in the city. The trajectory of the narrative reveals two planes of consciousness, in the first person point of view.

> We all remember that time. It was no

> different for me than for others. Yet we do tell each other over and over again the particularities of the events we shared, and the repetition, the listening, is as if we are saying: 'It was like that for you, too?' then that confirms it, yes it was so, it must have been, I wasn't imagining things. We match or dispute things like people who have seen remarkable creatures on a journey. . . . but perhaps it wouldn't be out of place here to comment on the way we - everyone - will look back over a period in life, over a sequence of events, and find much more there than they did at the time. (7)

The linear narration is disrupted both temporally and spatially with the narrator entering the second plane of her narration -- that of her own inner reality -- which she enters through the wall of her flat.

In the beginning of *The Memoirs of the Survivor*, the reader is directed to settle into the seemingly realistic

frame which presents a fully realised world in which the main character confronts a social dilemma. It is analogous with the Free Women section of *The Golden Notebook*.

In *The Memoirs of a Survivor*, no sooner is the reader settled within the cosy realistic narrative, than she/he is presented with an alternate frame -- a mystic or mythic dimension in which the laws of time and space are suspended. Throughout the novel the narrator negotiates frequent shifts between these two radically incompatible worlds. The problem is that this frame-shifting mechanism falters as the reader develops resistance to being shifted between frames. Finally in the last section, the device breaks down altogether.

At the outset of *The Memoirs of a Survivor*, Lessing is particularly careful to establish well defined boundaries between the two worlds so that the reader is aware of the shifts between two worlds. The material world of outer catastrophe is well established as the consistent world before the narrator's inner world of chaos is introduced. Though chronologically the story of the inner consciousness is introduced later, very soon it dominates the whole

narrative. While presenting the first shift into the inner world, the narrator deliberately constructs a bridge of several paragraphs explicitly addressing the issue of the different levels of consciousness on which she anchors her several realities:

> The consciousness of that other life developing there so close to me, hidden from me, was a slow thing, coming precisely into the category of understanding we describe in the world realised with its connotation of a gradual opening into comprehension. . . . Even at my dimmest and thickest I did know what I was becoming conscious of, what I was on the edge of realising, was different in quality from what in fact went on around me. (10)

The inner world of the narrator is provided with a spatial compartment. A wall in the narrator's ground floor flat dissolves and the reader is led to the inner world. It exists just beyond her living room wall, "occupying the same space as -- or, rather, overlapping with -- the

corridor" (10). The narrator enters this realm of her inner self -- "moving through the tall quiet wall" (41). In this way the narrator keeps the two worlds almost distinct for both herself and the reader, at least until the middle of the novel.

The highly self-conscious narrator begins the narrative before the time of the fiction begins. The account of the catastrophic world is presented in retrospect for the readers -- in effect translating the unspeakable back into language, as nearly as possible. But towards the end the narrator detaches herself from the narrative in which she is the central character, circling back upon her experience to retell it in the form of a memoir which is the novel itself. The distance from Mary Turner of *The Grass is Singing* to the unnamed narrator in *The Memoirs of a Survivor* however shows the degree to which the psychological elements and the route of the formulation of the narrative out of chaos, have altered. For both women, the threat is the chaotic fragmentation of the outer world, the task is the necessity of finding a way beyond, or through the chaos. It results in madness in Mary Turner and gnosis in the unnamed narrator of *The Memoirs*

of a Survivor. Both represent the diverse potentialities of consciousness.

The second system of order introduced by the narrator in *The Memoirs of a Survivor* makes the text so inscrutable that the reader is forced to abandon her/his usual perception of the text. At this point the content and the form of the narrative fuse.

> Moving through the wall, quiet white wall, as impermanent as theatre sets, knowing that the real inhabitant was there, just behind the next wall. . . . It was the first of the 'personal' experiences. This was the word I used for them from the start. And the atmosphere was unmistakable always, as soon as I entered whatever scene it was. That is, between the feeling or texture or mood of the scenes which were not 'personal', like, for instance, the long quiet room that had been so devastated, or any of the events, no matter how wearying or difficult or discouraging,

> that I saw in this or that setting -- between these and the 'personal' scenes a world lay; the two kinds, 'personal' (though not necessarily to me) and the other, existed in spheres quite different and separated. (39-40)

This personal world is atemporal, an aspatial plane shifting in time, responding to the narrator's need to construct a counter reality into which she and the other characters eventually escape. Throughout this narrative the narrator shuttles between the point of view of a child and that of an adult.

Emily, the child who appears in the narrative mysteriously after the narrator has passed through the wall for the first time, is also the narrator as child. Lessing's narrator revisits the past in all its horror with the eyes of Emily the child, seeing from her perspective the large and threatening atmosphere of fear and sterility.

The narrator and the mysterious others, the 'we' for whom she speaks, attempt to continue the application of rational modes and routines in a situation where logical

reasoning, far from warding off the catastrophe, actually becomes its mode of expression (Waugh 81). The reader is informed that,

> This is the sort of thing we accepted as normal. Yet for all of us there were moments, when the game we were all agreeing to play simply could not stand up to events: we would be gripped by feelings of unreality like nausea. Perhaps this feeling, that the ground was dissolving under our feet, was the real enemy . . . or we believed it to be so. Perhaps our tacit agreement that nothing much, or at least nothing irrecoverable was happening, was because for us the enemy was Reality, was to allow ourselves to know what was happening. (21)

Though as Patricia Waugh says, the unusual fictional use of 'we' is attempted as a strategy to create a consensus in a situation where the possibility of any agreement has become uncertain (82). The singular

perspective of both the child and adult antithetically project scenes of violence and total collapse where nothing can bring unification. The narrator's friends, Emily and Gerald, represent the young generation who physically survive the catastrophic race of their world, while the burden of attaining spiritual salvation falls on the narrator. This she seeks in the astral world, which she enters by concentrating on a submerged design on the living room wall of her 'real life':

> Once there had been wall paper. It had been painted over, but under the paint outlines of flowers, leaves, birds were still visible. When in the morning sun did fall on part of that wall a half obliterated pattern showed so clearly that the mind followed suggestions of trees and a garden into a belief that the wash of light was making colour green, yellow, a certain shade of clear shell pink. (12)

The primary world of the novel is a material realm bound by spatial and temporal norms; the secondary world is

a purely supernal one, set out side time and space. It is a world of archetypal figures -- gardens, birds, leaves, flowers, magic carpets, goddesses arranged so as to constitute a spiritual vision. This hypothetisation of an ideal reality acts as a standard against which life in the quotidian realm can be measured. At first the narrator makes this distinction clear by consistently affirming the visionary function of the world behind the wall. But as the narrative moves along, the narrator has a jumbled vision, which she never tries to schematise and synchronize. Towards the end of the novel all the principal characters have left the primary world and entered the world 'beyond the wall'.

The intention of the final passage is to fuse the two worlds into one new and different universe. The construction of the final scene presents a puzzle to the reader. The reader is no more placed at a vantage point from where she/he can decipher the world within and without the wall. Although from the beginning itself there have been indications that the two worlds will interpenetrate, the narrator gives the reader an impression that the outer world of crisis is the primary one and the unreal/fanciful

world is an imaginative offshoot of it. Then suddenly in the last paragraph of the novel the narrator attempts a shift in the hierarchy of worlds. She says that the characters from the unreal world have approached the border of her inner world and have climbed through it:

> Emily took Gerald by the hand, and with Hugo walked through the screen of the forest into . . . and now it is hard to say exactly what happened. We were in that place which might present us with anything -- rooms furnished this way or that and spanning the tastes and customs of millennia; walls broken, falling, growing again; a house roof like a forest floor sprouting grasses and birds' nests; rooms smashed, littered, robbed; a bright green lawn . . . around which, and reflected in the black shine, stood Emily, Hugo, Gerald, her officer father, her large, laughing, gallant mother and little Denis, the four-year-old criminal,

> clinging to Gerald's hand, clutching it, and looking up into his face, smiling - there they stood. . . . (189)

With that action the initial frame of the novel is broken, and the reader is forced to accept the new frame as primary.

Since the rational perspective is embodied in the world of the catastrophe and the intuitive perspective in the world behind the wall, if the reader refuses to walk into the world behind the wall, she is refusing to adopt the new vision of reality towards which the narrator has obviously intended to lead her/him. Obviously the narrator intends to move her reader from one order of perception to another, which is beyond the merely rational. But by the time the reader enters and gets accustomed to the new order of perception, she/he falters again when the narrator partly steps out of the new frame of the narrative once again. As Betsy Draine puts it, the reader also "is forced to step outside both frames and disengage herself/himself from the act of participation in the novel as world. This is experienced as a repudiation of the text as a whole" (120).

In terms of the narrative, the two dimensions explored in *The Memoirs of a Survivor* are disclosed as interpenetrable. Both are metaphorical framings of reality, and the concluding image of the novel, the dissolution of the walls, can be seen as their synthesis.

It was with this novel that Lessing cast off realism as a mode of narration:

> In *The Memoirs of a Survivor*, what the narrator believes that she is seeing behind the wall, that apparent dream world, actually represents her own childhood. In the tangible world, Emily whom she sees growing up represents the image of her adolescence. Thus reality and dream, marked off by the wall, complement each other to give an all compassing vision to the narrator's past. I have said that *The Memoirs of a Survivor* was my imaginative autobiography. (*Putting* 148)

Again,

> Behind the wall, there are three

> different kinds of things going on: the personal memories and the dreams, a lot of which come from my own, and the third is impersonal. (*Putting* 174)

The conclusion of *The Memoirs of a Survivor* is perhaps the most obscure of the endings of Lessing's novels, as the narrator 'miserably fails to express the experience through words', when the barriers that segregate experiences into compartments dissolve and all antinomies of consciousness are synthesized to a higher level of consciousness. As Anna Wulf says, "the real experience can't be described"(*The Golden Notebook* 542), the reader is made to feel that in this novel too language is incapable of rendering that state exactly. Lessing has said of The *Memoirs of a Survivor* that it was "the direct result of my meditating about the inadequacy of language. I write as in legends or in fairy tales, by means of metaphors and analogies" (*Putting* 67).

Like Lessing, Morrison also realises her narrative desires through the medium of formal articulation. All subversive strategies of narration are aimed at challenging the dominant ideology's monopoly of meanings and tendency

to totalise. That Morrison is about to shatter given notions regarding the art of storytelling is evident from the very first sentence of her first novel, *The Bluest Eye*. "Quiet as it is kept," is a phrase commonly used by black people to mean that a big lie is about to be told (interview with Le Clair 3).

Morrison's narrators and characters, says Rainwater, are "the locus of various kinds of uncertainty that have become a subject of her fiction" (96). Morrison is aiming at narrative procedures which, like jazz, will resist closure (McKay 424).

Morrison makes extensive use of looping narrative lines, multiple narration and flashbacks. The cumulative effect of all this indirection is that it encodes some sort of apprehension. Morrison's treatment of Cholly's incestuous rape of Pecola, for example, ends up foregrounding an awareness of the complexity of judgement and feeling, and this is true of *The Bluest Eye* as a whole. The construction of *Beloved* is predicated on a similar pattern of backward loopings, multi-voiced narration and flashbacks.

In *The Bluest Eye*, except for Claudia's narrative and

some passages of self reflection by Pauline Breedlove, and Pecola in lunatic fantasy, all other situations are narrated by the ostensibly omniscient narrator. But only temporarily does the narrator dominate the situation. Linda Dittmar observes that "Morrison's omniscient narrators, whose points of view only intermittently imply her own apparent authorial point of view are ultimately bereft of certainty". The multiple points of view prevent the omniscient narrator from pronouncing judgements on situations and characters which in turn prevent readers also from making authoritative pronouncements. This use of omniscient narrators who "emerge bereft of truth and clarity that are traditionally theirs" (Dittmar 143), is a strategic attack on culture's monopoly of meanings, that creates/promotes narrators who are god-like -- omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient.

Cholly Breedlove, for instance, is a "drunkard and dirty nigger who has the meanest eyes in the town" (35). The omniscient narrator informs the reader that Cholly beats his wife. But later the same voice discovers that when "Pauline discovered that she was pregnant . . . he surprised her by being pleased" (96). To their surprise the

readers soon come to understand that they cannot pronounce judgement on Cholly's rape of his eleven year old daughter Pecola. What he experiences is a mixture of emotions for his daughter -- "revulsion, guilt, pity, then love"(27). Perhaps, he might not have been able to comprehend the father-child relationship since he himself had been deprived of the pleasures that go with childhood. His mind was confused and "the memories of Pauline and the doing of a wild and forbidden thing excited him"(128). In the penultimate passage Claudia sums it up thus:

> Cholly loved her. I am sure he did. He, at any rate, was the one who loved her enough to touch her, envelop her, give something of himself to her. But his touch was fatal, and the something he gave her filled the matrix of her agony with death. Love is never any better than the lover. Wicked people love wickedly, violent people love violently, weak people love weakly, stupid people love stupidly, but the love of a free man is never, never

safe. There is no gift for the beloved. (159-160)

Likewise, Morrison's *Beloved* also shows the incapability to fix meanings as transparent and certain. Contemporary novels that revise the slave narratives draw on and participate in the debate around representation and narration, examining self-consciously how to write about slavery. These, when exploring the problems associated with the telling of the female slave's sexual experience, become as much about the act of writing as they are about the incidents themselves. In such contexts, the multiple point of view is employed as the angle of vision which alternates between the individual and her world. Implied always is the discrepancy of vision, containable truth and objectivity of analysis.

Beloved is full of narrative evasions and subversions. The central subject of the novel is infanticide, an act generally considered to be cruel/brutal beyond equivocation. Yet, by placing this act as a "not unthinkable response to a historically typical dilemma based on a real incident", Morrison forces the reader from a normatively judgemental to a morally agnostic relation to

the action. The infanticide becomes so problematic as to require multiple narrative perspectives to unfold its various significations.

Morrison's use of multiple narrative voices is a modern counterpart of the story telling tradition of the oral agrarian culture.

> The strongest influence of the development of the black women's narratives derives from the storytelling tradition. Everybody participates in the storytelling and story-listening. Although certain individuals might give a better rendition of a particular story, or might be better endowed as narrators, no one is excluded from telling or denied an audience. Women tell tales equal to men, and children as well as the elderly participate. (Willis 15)

Thus Claudia's role as a young narrator coming of age only partly shapes the novel. Interacting with adjacent voices, she contributes to the larger process of narrative

formation. While for Claudia the initiating impetus for narration is the need to account for the fact that, "Quiet as it's kept, there were no marigolds in the fall of 1941" (9), neither Claudia nor the other narrators give any assurance regarding that. "There is nothing more to say," Claudia notes at the end of her brief introduction, "except why. But since why is difficult to handle, one must take refuge in how" (9). Morrison is reluctant to endow Claudia with the complete power over narration or to supplement Claudia's incomplete vision forcefully. Thus, though the novel's use of a multi-voiced community affirms the gift of sharing and belonging, its orchestration also disperses power, deflects responsibility, and questions the efficacy of the story-telling act. This orchestrated narrative disrupts chronology and splinters plot.

Claudia, who narrates the first section of each chapter, relates matters about her own life and that of her own family as well as information concerning Pecola about which she has first hand knowledge. The omniscient narrator conveys information about the histories of older characters. In between, many voices in retrospection, like those of Polly and Cholly surface. Towards the end of the

narrative the reader hears Pecola's schizophrenic double-voice. After the onset of this double-voicedness, the distinctive narrative voices merge into a single voice. Claudia's voice sometimes occupies that of the omniscient narrator, conflating both as in the last paragraphs of the novel:

> So it was. A little black girl yearns for the blue eyes of a little white girl, and the horror at heart of her yearning is exceeded only by the evil of fulfilment. . . . and now when I see her searching the garbage - for what? The thing we assassinated? I talk about how I did not plant the seeds too deeply, how it was the fault of the earth, the land, and our own town. . . . it is too late. At least on the edge of my town, among the garbage and the sunflowers of my town, it's much, much too late. (159-160)

The cumulative effect of this decentralisation is that *The Bluest Eye* remains inconclusive to the very end. On the

whole its disrupted construction works to undermine the text's illusion including the authenticating use of narrative viewpoints. This dismantling design acknowledges the insufficiency of any one voice.

> The overall effect of this complexly structured work is to foreground the authorial project of orchestrating a fluid, multi-voiced novel, where the parts sometimes jostle against one another, sometimes complement or blend with each other, and at all times project a rather dense sense of the multiplicity of narration. Since the function of the storytelling act is, as Claudia puts it, to explain Morrison's juxtaposition of diverse voices asserts that understanding is always collective. (Dittmar 141)

Beloved also employs the device of multiple narration. The omniscient narrator intervenes continually and names the characters from her capacity as characters cannot. When the character recalls things which are 'unspeakable', the

omniscient narrator conveys the message to the reader in a language the reader understands. The smell of burning hair raises unpleasant memories in Sethe's mind, and the narrator says that it is the story of the act of infanticide her own mother performed.

The Bluest Eye begins with the Dick and Jane story of a primary reader. It is repeated twice -- the first repetition is without punctuation and capitalisation and the lines and words are closer. The next time the passage occurs without punctuation, capitalisation or spaces between words or sentences. The words are so close that one can not identify separate words or sentences. It is very difficult to make any sense of the passage. Though the first letter is capitalised, which clearly indicates a beginning, there is no sign of an 'end' at the 'end' of the passage. This is an obvious indication of lack of closure in the narrative.

According to Ogunyemi, these typographical arrangements are symbolic representations of three different kinds of life. The first typographically perfect version suggests the ideal white family, which is represented in the novel by the household where Pauline

Breedlove is a servant. The second partly broken down version is symbolic of the MacTeer family which admits of some lack of order and arrangement but still has some order, some form of control, some love. The final version of complete chaos and disorder corresponds to the Breedloves (112). Morrison herself offers an explanation for such a typographical arrangement.

> As the novel proceeded I wanted that primer version broken up and confused, which explain the typographical running together of words. (Le Claire 29)

Shelly Wong says that, "by omitting punctuation and capitalisation Morrison begins to break up -- and down -- conventional syntactic hierarchies, conventional ways of ordering private and public narratives (473). Taking all these views into consideration, the first version may be read as a text of life with all its closed and framed systems -- life institutionalised by religion, community, race, class, gender, marriage or other forms imposed upon it, life compartmentalised and seen from 'above' or the seeming reality of life. The second version may be equated with what an individual experiences to be the reality of

life. The third broken up and confused version is the reality Morrison wanted to show her readers. She wanted to break away from all conventional forms and make the 'formlessness' the form of her fiction.

According to Hedin, *The Bluest Eye* represents an intentional inversion of the primer (42). Morrison employs the primer not only as the preparatory material to the text proper, but also to introduce the chapters, which inversely bind the theme with the epigrammatic lines of the primer. For example, the chapter which introduces the Breedlove family where the father rapes the daughter, the mother abuses the daughter to console a white child, where 'Dick' runs away and 'Jane' goes mad in her search for blue eyes, is prefaced by the line from the primer: HEREISTHEFAMILYMOTHERFATHERDICKANDJAINTHEYLIVEINTHEGREENAN DWHITEHOUSETHA REVERYH.

> In her systematic analysis of an inversive relationship between pretext (the primer) and text (the Afro-American life), the author dissects, deconstructs, if you will, the bourgeois myths of ideal family life. (Awkward 178-179)

In *Beloved* also Morrison is highly conscious about language -- its potential for repression and expression. The writing is sometimes fluid, open, created in the first person with no names and no reference to time or place. While breaking the barriers of form this rhetoric communicates what Morrison's ghost-character, which moves beyond human barriers, communicates. The reader confronts the instability and inadequacy of language perhaps most powerfully in the passages of interior monologue told from the points of view of Sethe, Denver and Beloved. After telling Paul D about Sethe's murder of her daughter Beloved, Stamp Paid, the man who conveyed the family to freedom is turned away from Sethe's house, 124 Bluestone Road, by the "undecipherable language . . . of the black and angry dead" (121). The narrator tells us that mixed in with those voices were the thoughts of the women of 124 -- unspeakable and unspoken thoughts.

In the next four sections the reader is confronted with these thoughts of Sethe, Denver and Beloved, first separately, then interwoven. From Sethe's perspective unfold the memories of killing her daughter, of being beaten and abused by the slave owners. Largely addressed to

Beloved, Sethe's words convey recollections she could never convey to anybody else. Likewise, in her section, Denver expresses her fear of her mother and her yearning to be rescued by her father -- anxieties that had been hidden so far in the novel.

Beloved makes the most inscrutable and obscure tirade. Her monologue is the most powerfully subjective, for, she is the victim of the infanticide around which all the other characters' sorrows hinge. As Valerie Smith says, "the words that convey the recollections and desires of someone who is at once in time and out of time, alive and dead, are richly allusive and defy interpretation" (351).

The sentences, phrases and words of this section are separated by spaces, not by marks of punctuation. Only the first person pronoun and the first letter in each paragraph are capitalised. According to Marilyn Mobley the effect of this arrangement is to place all the moments of Beloved's sensation and recollection in a continuous and eternal present (359).

The complexity of points of view and presentation of narrators who do not seek an impartial and objective

verdict on the events make the characters "uncontainable and untotalisable" ("The Art of Fiction" 117) into a formal unity. They evade closure as their stories do. In the hands of an 'unreliable' and 'immature' narrator, character delineation is always in the process, it never attains completion.

The circular patterns in Morrison's novels evade closure showing the unreachability of completion. Pecola, the central character of *The Bluest Eye* inhabits a world devoid of love and acceptance. Born into a poor and black family that lived at the storefront, she considered herself an outcast. Her search for the blue eyes, that represent beauty and recognition, leads her to insanity. Pecola's story is conveyed through devices of encirclement. Her story fits the small circles inside the larger seasonal cycles of the narrative. But this device fails to close. Pecola goes mad in the end and is lost in the world of fantasy which cannot tolerate barriers and closures. The whole narrative is segmented according to the four seasons. But even the brightest of seasons does not exude the warmth or jubilation of fulfilment traditionally associated with it. Pecola's incestuous rape comes in the spring section

and she goes mad in summer. The novel has an open ending where spring has no flowers to offer and autumn is deprived of fruits.

In *Beloved* the title character's ontological status is unclear from the outset of the novel. The narrator concludes her story by telling the reader that she is 'disremembered and unaccounted for'. *Beloved* ends with a comment from the narrator: "It was not a story to pass on" (275). On the previous page the narrator says:

> They forgot her like a bad dream. After they made up their tales, shaped and decorated them, those that saw her that day on the porch quickly and deliberately forgot her. (274)

This statement implies that not only is Beloved's story too painful to remember by retelling but also her experience, like that of many of Morrison's other characters is uncontainable, untotalisable in a form that affords distance from what is being told.

Sula also displays a circular narrative pattern that the narrator demystifies as it proceeds. *Sula* recalls *The Bluest Eye* in implying that the yearly cycle produce

repetition but not completeness and closure.

Such withholding of closure is the essence of Morrison's narrative vision, which she tries to concretise through formal techniques. Linda Dittmar observes:

> The contradictory claims of form and content which Morrison strives to negotiate, especially when seen in relation to her particular ways of resisting closure, raise questions of narrative strategy and ideology specific to her work as a black woman writer and, by extension, to minority and female writing in general. (139-140)

Morrison sees her formal resistance to closure as a uniquely black aesthetic mode akin to black music, and though she uses it as an opportunity to free readers to tap new capabilities within themselves, like the ambiguity of judgement in Cholly's rape of Pecola, the question also arises whether deflection may not have a political motive behind it. Raymond Hedin asserts this point when he argues that Afro-American novelists have traditionally turned to strategies of evasion and indirection in order to suppress

or disguise racial anger (35-36).

Beloved is structured by a series of flashbacks, which bridge the shattered generations by repeating multi-layered images. The characters have been so profoundly affected by the experience of slavery that time cannot separate them from its horrors or undo its effects. The slightest sensation triggers within them memories that circle in their minds.

The power of community among black women reaches its highest level in *Beloved*, where three generations of women form a bond, through the recognition of their suffering. Of the opening of *Beloved* Morrison has said:

> The reader is snatched, yanked, thrown into an environment which is completely foreign, and I want it as the first stroke of the shared experience that might be possible between the reader and the novel's population. Snatched just as the slaves were from one place to another, the narration moves from one place to another, without any preparation and without any

defence. ("Unspeakable Things" 32)

Like *The Bluest Eye*, *Beloved* also displays an element of self-consciousness about the process of its writing the novel. In short, the predicament that Morrison creates for her readers is not just that Cholly rapes his daughter or that Sethe murders her daughter and what these acts indicate about racism, slavery, poverty and related problems. The predicament is also that the dispersed chronology, shifting viewpoints and such narrative indirections that these novels present, inscribe an ambivalent mode of reading by undermining all prevalent notions of author-reader relations.

The narrative subversion in the novels of Lessing and Morrison is the consequence and reflection of the contradictory claims of conventional form and the complexity of content, which they strive to negotiate. This, when seen in relation to their particular ways of resistance to various structures, raises questions of narrative strategy and ideology specific to their works as women writers.

Myth as Strategy: An E s c a p e from t h e Chaos of Time

P.S. Jaya “Fiction, form and resistance: A study of the novels of Doris Lessing and Toni Morrison” Thesis. Department of English , University of Calicut, 2001

Chapter III Myth as Strategy: An Escape from the Chaos of Time

Focus on the chaotic nature of time is central to self-conscious writers of marginalized groups. Bonnie J. Barthold observes that this chaos "mimes historical reality that has existed. . . . Sometimes time is simple, 'indifferent like ice or snow'. At its worst, time becomes a malignant force hostile to human concerns.'(98). In the works of Doris Lessing and Toni Morrison conventional concepts of time often become not a dimension that one inhabits, but an antagonistic force, in the disruption of which they seek their freedom.

The historical concept of time demands linear movement. To reject the linear fragmentation of time is to reject history as it is presented by the dominant ideology. For those who have never been in it, the rejection of history is not only an escape from it, but an attempt to demolish its precepts. As Trudier Harris says, "the cyclic

direction of time annuls its irreversibility" (32). Lessing and Morrison feel that no event is irreversible and no transformation is final. Everything begins over again. The focus is consistently on time in its duality -- a character's inner vision at odds with that of her/his world.

In most of Lesssing's and Morrison's narrative texts both the inner and outer vision of time are chaotic and in conflict with each other. These writers resist the intransigence of time through narrative techniques like the shifting of point of view, the use of mythical concepts, and that of aberrational consciousness. Charles Watkins in *Briefing for a Descent into Hell* and Shadrack in *Sula* resist the mad acceleration of time which breeds barrenness and destruction through psychic fragmentation. The narrative fragments time into an insane discontinuity, disintegrates it into chaotic bits that are driven back and forth at the will of the narrator. In postmodernist texts the shifts of point of view indicate the irrelevance of putting events in terms of a linear historical view. What predominates in Lessing's fiction is the struggle between the timeless realm of myth and the temporal realm of

history, but of course, as in Morrison's narratives, within the context of the unity of both towards the finale.

While Lessing uses the archetypal dream in *The Summer Before the Dark* to manipulate time and to travel to the linear regions of consciousness, Morrison uses spatial journeying to mythical realms to anchor the narrative in the ancestral past in *Song of Solomon*. Historically this vision of Morrison's involves the retention of the African heritage, development of a sense of black community in the new world and resistance to various kinds of western attempts at dispossession. As Barthold says, "Black fiction, like Black history is in large measure the chronicle of the struggle against the contingencies of time . . . it bears witness to the power of a sense of time antithetical to the secular fragmentation of the world one inhabits"(106). When Sethe in *Beloved* murders her baby she is recapitulating her assertion of dominance over past, a time which she fears will swallow up her future.

In Lessing's *The Summer before the Dark* Kate Browne's inner journey to the untravelled parts of her consciousness is made possible through a series of archetypal dreams. While both Lessing and Morrison

manipulate time and redeem their contingencies, differences in the manner and form of this manipulation may reflect these writers' differing orientation towards time.

The mythological dimensions of Morrison's texts explore and reclaim the variegated world of black diaspora which challenge the western configurations of time and space. The celebration of cyclic time anchors the texts in both temporal as well as timeless realms. She fuses her recollection of history with that of myth. Myth in her novels aids the retrieval of lost history. This duality of focus shapes the form of *Song of Solomon* and *Tar Baby.* Throughout black fiction the absence of circularity of time and repetition constitute a spiritual loss. Dorothea D. Mbalia observes that there is a further duality apparent throughout black fiction -- between past and present typically portrayed through the use of memory (83). Memory unlocks time and allows the character herself/himself to see her/his own duality as she/he becomes both the spectator and the spectacle. Morrison uses memory in *Beloved* to structure the entire novel. When Beloved appears from the past which Sethe wants to forget and escape, the relationship between Sethe as narrator, and the events she

narrates become complex and clearly signal a disjuncture between the past and the present. In *Sula* time is conjured with Sula's arrival after years of absence.

Lessing's concern with the inadequacy of the present system of knowledge and the evolution of consciousness can be recognised as the informing structure of her deeply revelatory novel, *The Summer Before the Dark*:

> Since the evolution of consciousness in Lessing's fiction is towards the universal, it necessitates a change in her methods of characterisation and presentation as well, if she is to express the immediate relationship between the illusion of a self-contained ego and the reality of universal forces, powers, currents and cosmic energies . . . the diction and syntax reminiscent of those in parables, fables and in the archetypal myths. (Kaplan 5)

Kate Brown's journey of discovery also corresponds to the traditional paradigm of spiritual journeying, a journey

both circular and linear. Her dream about the seal is a mythical answer to the questions at the spiritual or unconscious level. Her serial dream about the seal's rescue and struggle provides a dynamic inner structure that is a counter movement to the novel's action. The dream sequence with its aleatory potential moves the realistic linear narrative temporality by leaps and bounds. The dream begins "like the start of an epic, simple and direct" (34) and its individual episodes conform to a consistent archetypal pattern. A characteristic feature of archetypal logic is the way images may actually be condensations of clusters of associations:

> Kate must overcome the obstacles posed by the adversity of nature and the backward pull of human desires on her perilous journey to return the seal to the ocean. The animal's suffering in its bitterly cold environment away from the sea corresponds with a description of Kate sitting with her shoulders hunched; they were set to withstand the sort of cold a living

> animal must feel if its skin is ripped off. . . . The general movement within the dream -- Kate's dragging and carrying the heavy seal in her arms -- symbolises Kate's growing awareness that during the years of being conditioned into her role as lover, wife and mother. (Kaplan 11-12)

Lessing has found dreams highly useful as they are subversive of conventional narrative techniques:

> Dreams have always been important to me. The hidden domain of our mind communicates with us through dreams. I dream a great deal and I scrutinise my dreams. The more I scrutinise my dreams the more I dream. When I am stuck in a book I deliberately dream. . . . I fill my brain with the material for a new book, go to sleep, and I usually come up with a dream which resolves the dilemma. With a few symbols a dream can define the whole of one's life, and warn

> us of future too. It can go beyond the conventional. (*Putting* 14)

Dreams do seem to find an essential part in Lessing's works. In *The Grass is Singing* and *The Summer before the Dark,* she has merged them both at the thematic and the formal levels. Lessing says:

> In *The Summer before the Dark* I built dreams right into the story, so that the way out for this woman was in fact through her dreams of this magical seal that she found on the hill side. They have immense potential for moving beyond the realms of consciousness. (*Putting* 54)

While realism or mimesis assumes the authority of the social context of experience developed along a linear dimension, romance assumes the authority of the metaphorical or mythical aspects of experience realised as part of a cyclic process. The tension between them is an important element of Lessing's narrative design. In *The Summer Before the Dark,* these two dimensions of the narrative are not totally integrated till the end. The tone occasionally wanders in between and often the reader is not

certain in which sense the overtly stylised mythic images and the dreams are to be comprehended.

In *Briefing for a Descent into Hell* Lessing exploits the narrative liberties of romances and science fiction through the use of archetypal myths and speculative cosmic paradigms. Charles Watkins, in one of his enlightened moments finds himself at a cosmic conference presided over by an 'illumined deity', the Sun. There he learns that the troubled planet earth is in a state of emergency. The cosmic spirits including Merk Ury, Minna Erva and other cosmic beings -- refracted from Watkins's intellectual familiarity with Greek classics -- are being briefed to carry the easily forgotten message of harmony to Earth's inhabitants once again before it self-destructs. The forecast for Earth made by the benevolent overseers echoes the extrapolated future envisioned at the end of *The Four Gated City*. The vision of the planetary crisis ends with the appearance of a new breed with an altered mental structure promoting increased powers of perception and endowed with the heritage of previous generations.

The psychic journey of Kate Brown is the central

preoccupation of Lessing's *The Summer Before the Dark*. As a supportive wife and a nurturing mother Kate has invested most of her life in the care and well being of her family. Time stands .still for her, indifferent and stagnant. The narrative moves through these sections in a linear way making no jumps or bounces. The string of consequences is very smooth and devoid of knots and breaks. Unlike Martha Quest of *The Four Gated City*, who is of her own age, Kate Brown has made no attempts to see herself.

When Kate tries to locate the centre of her being, later in the novel, the narrative suggests the circularity of her journey backward in time. Though the concept of development implicitly in Lessing's novels suggests chronological or horizontal approach in a linear direction, an equally compelling circular pattern informs most of her novels. In the formal narrative design and the thematic organisation of her works, the end is almost in the beginning.

As soon as Kate tries to locate the centre of her own self, the narrative line divides into an outer realistic strain that adheres to the linearity of time, and an inner realm of dream, archetype and myth. Rather than emphasising

the irreconcilability of these two modes of experience as is done in *Briefing for a Descent into Hell,* this novel describes their gradual alignment and convergence. Less self-divided than Charles Watkins, Kate Brown traverses both a geographical and psychological circle during the course of the novel.

The first sentence of *The Summer Before the Dark* -- "A woman stood on her back step, arms folded, waiting" (3) becomes, as Rubenstein says, a clue to the protagonist's psychic state. Though Kate is waiting for the kettle to boil, the rest of the novel reveals that it is a metaphor for the state of her psychological anticipation, that shapes the novel's meaning (202). Kate's husband is about to depart for the United States for a summer lecturing commitment, her four children have made diverse travel arrangements and Kate herself is persuaded to take on a temporary job as a translator as favour to one of her husband's friends.

The novel is divided into five sections: 'At Home', 'Global Food', 'The Holiday', 'The Hotel', and 'Maureen's Flat'. Kate's journey begins with her new job, translating Portuguese into English at an international conference on

coffee in London. Once separated from her home and family, Kate's awareness of her inner situation begins to surface. It is in the hotel room where she stays, that she can direct her psychic energy towards stripping away the clutter of her past:

> In her room, before going to sleep, she looked at its neatness, its difference to her, and thought that, yes, this was much better than her large family house . . . full, crammed, jostling with objects everyone of which had some associations, histories, belonged to this person or that, mattered, were important. This small box of a room, that had in it a bed, a chair, a chest of drawers, a mirror - yes, this is what she would choose if she could choose. (34)

This new room [illegible] is the [illegible] of dream and [illegible] [illegible]

drawing room. This analogy is developed further in *The Summer before the Dark* through the form of the extended interior journey which becomes the central narrative event in the novel, and that is conveyed through a series of dreams in the mythic realm on a recurring theme. The only difference being that Kate escapes from stagnant time while the unnamed narrator of *The Memoirs of a Survivor* escapes from the chaos and turbulence of the temporal realm. Throughout Lessing's work the mythic dimension functions prominently as a successful narrative device for disrupting all conventional notions of time, particularly as they work themselves into the protagonist's awareness. Lessing has acknowledged her interest in myths and archetypes in an interview with Jonah Raskin, while stating her allegiance to Jungian analyses. It is evident in the image of the Mother Sugar depicted in *The Golden Notebook.*

In *The Summer before the Dark,* myth occupies the structural level and fashions the narrative's temporal itineraries. As the narrative progresses, Kate's inner self finds expression and rounds off things for her. The narrative moves circularly as the archetypal dream unfurls. Kate initially rejected the seal because her society would

not allow her to accept that part of herself which was identified with the unconscious. By exploring her dreams and by allowing herself to become aware of her unconscious desires, Kate makes it possible for the seal to grow so that at the end of the novel it occupies an equivalent position equivalent to that of her acceptable social self. The dream thus becomes the path back to herself which, when completed, will lead back to her familial and community relationships, carrying her other self along with her.

Kate's first seal dream occurs near the beginning of the second chapter of the novel, just after she begins working for Global Food and is staying in a hotel room. What precipitates in the dream are Kate's thoughts about the possibilities of choice in her life. This takes place immediately after she enters the room:

> This small box of a room, that had in it a bed, a chair, a chest of drawers, if she could chose . . . she dreamed later when this night's dream had fallen into place in the pattern, had become the first instalment of the study or the journey that she followed in her

> sleep. She tried to remember more of it, more of the detail. But while she was sure of its atmosphere, the feel -- which mixed anxiety and joy in a way that could never happen in waking life - - the details had gone. The dream had become by morning -- she had woken in the dark to try and grab the tail of the dream before it slid off and away - - like the start of an epic, simple and direct. (34)

The dream concerns Kate's involvement with a dying seal struggling to get back to water. Metaphorically the seal is her own inner self, dying from lack of sustenance. As she enters her own private room completely, the perspective of abnormal consciousness takes over. She recognizes the seal's precarious position, as it is out of its natural habitat and takes it as her responsibility to assist it back to its environment. "In the dream that Kate reflects on so frequently", says Ralph Berets, "the sense of loss and separation is captured in the image of the injured seal, which represents that part of the self

that has been disowned in order for the individual to accommodate herself to the pressures of her social milieu" (120). Kate sees the seal as a central component of herself. At this point, the chronology of the narrative doubles back to show Kate's younger life. Since she married when she was fairly young, and raised children instead of pursuing her own career, the seal part of herself, that is her unconscious, is not developed. She did not identify and respond to her inner desires. Her revelations come from the exploration of this series of dreams.

In the second dream the seal is slippery to hold on to and Kate feels disoriented and finds her endeavours unrealised. She fears she is no longer in tune with her inner self. At this stage Formally and thematically the narrative becomes stuck and time stagnant. Kate finds it difficult to perform her task of taking the seal to its habitat and struggles to recapture the elusive dream. During her next sleep the seal is transformed into a turtle. She is constantly reminded of this turtle through a film she has seen several times. The turtle, after laying eggs moves inland instead of towards the sea. The narrative moving backward to Kate's familial life suggests that she

cannot live on in that status. "While she could do nothing for the turtle who was going to die, she must save the seal" (68).

The narrative moves in a linear way as Kate waits for a long time before the next dream appears. She is distracted by her affair with Geoffrey, an American. When the dream comes again the seal is about to expire and is lying abandoned on the floor of the bathhouse, waiting for her. Kate leaves her princely lover saying, "I am sorry, I want to stay with you, but I must take the seal to the sea first" (101). She no more wants to accommodate her desires to the needs of others.

In the next dream sequence, Kate struggles with her seal as it gets heavier. Kate perceives the intricacy with which the dreams have fused with her life:

> Going to sleep and entering this dream was as much her business for this time in her life as being in this hotel in the poor dusty village in a blazing August, as visiting Geoffrey and waiting for his recovery, as wrestling with her emotional self, which seemed like a

> traitor who has come to life inside her. What she was engaged in was the dream, which worked itself out in her. (128-129)

In the next dream episode Kate sees herself in the midst of some wild animals who tried to attack her and the seal. At this point Kate is able to identify her situation as a precarious one since she has antagonised the powers within the social structure. The seal protects her, shielding her from a community that harshly attacks those who do not conform to the prescribed patterns of behaviour. In another dream Kate participates in a ritualistic dance that is performed with the king of the fairy tales. Later, the king's neglect infuriates her, which parallels Kate's fear of her husband's abandonment. In the narrative context of the story this dream vision illustrates how Kate has sacrificed her personal goals for those of her husband and children, this to the detriment of her own objectives and needs.

Kate's dream of abandonment by the mythical king reinforces her sense of obligation and commitment to her dream of carrying the seal to its natural habitat. In this

state of transition from doubtful to affirmative relations with the seal, she becomes physically and psychologically ill, which in turn effects a detachment of her dreams and her conscious thought. While thus putting her inner realm in order, Kate feels the seal dream slipping away, though she knows she has not completed her task. "In her sleep she felt like someone a couple of yards from the centre of the maze, but no matter how she turned and tried, she could not reach it" (195). The image of the centre again conceptualises the elusive goal of inner unity. Kate tries to revive the dream journey by relating the entire sequence to Maureen, her friend, with the detachment of telling a fairy tale. Here Lessing makes explicit the congruence between the mythic and the personal planes of the narrative. The objectivity of the fairy tale narration ends in subjectivity as Kate gradually narrates it as her own story. In the next dream the cutting edges of the snow wound her and the seal. Again, she becomes ill but her illness is actually the catalyst for her awakening. She knows that she dreams about the seal, but cannot recall the dreams. In a state of partial amnesia, she moves from the warmth of the sun to colder parts. But surprisingly, Kate

reaches a place where there seems to be eternal spring.

During the final dream episode, the seal becomes "so heavy now she was not able to do more than drag it over the snow. She was no longer anxious about the seal, that it might be dead or dying, she knew that it was full of life, and, like her, of hope" (240-241). While Kate first seeks to relegate the seal to the barren northern regions where it is always cold, she later recognises that the trip was a joyous path towards the liberation of herself and her unconscious desires.She finds herself walking no longer in snow but in the green grass with spring in full bloom, and filled with hope and joy she reaches the sea. She gently delivers the seal into the water and acknowledges that she has completed her task. Simultaneously she sees that "the sun was in front of her, not behind, not far behind, under the curve of the earth, which was where it had been so long"(267). Though, "the sun, her inner light, is restored, another, another light has been extinguished: the light that is the desire to please had gone out" (269).

With Kate's last dream of taking the seal to join the other seals, she is able to merge her unconscious with her self. She unifies her dreams with her present reality.

She becomes aware of the seal not as a dream but as a reality. Kate's journey comes full circle without closure.

> *The Summer before the Dark* ends not in winter darkness but in the symbolic sacrifices of autumn; Kate's assimilation of the dark side of her self, her inner life, makes it possible for her to face the inevitable darkness which accompanies older age, and, eventually death. (Rubenstein 215)

All the images in both the dream narrative and the surface narrative that parallels it reflect the dimension of the self that Kate Brown explores. What Kate has achieved is not a 'negative' freedom; she does not end 'helpless and lost' like the injured seal (Lefcowitz 118). She is able to replace her stagnant life with a more viable life both in her dream and in her sphere of action with the positive progression of the dream imagery and the growth and development of the seal. Like Anna wulf of *The Golden Notebook*, she reconnects herself to the same social structures that had initially prompted her self-estrangement. The circular design shapes the narrative

structure. But the change within Kate herself is the primary value of her journey. Kate's travels thus conclude with a less radical self-division compared to that of Charles Watkins in *Briefing for a Descent into Hell*, and a more meaningful reconciliation with her world than that of Watkins. Ralph Berets puts it more clearly:

> According to Jung's concepts of individuation, western man has progressed in such a fashion that he has sacrificed his unconscious affiliations Kate Brown must retrieve in her struggle with the seal. She must psychologically return to the primitive parts of herself that have remained basically undeveloped during her married life. . . . Once this process has been completed, then the individual is ready to return to her former roles, but this time with far greater strength and direction than were formerly possible. (122-123)

Kate Brown reaches a 'both/and' position, instead of an either/or one, which Charles Watkins asserts as the moment

of self-realisation.

While Lessing uses the archetypal dream in *The Summer before the Dark* to manipulate time and to travel to the inner regions of consciousness, Toni Morrison uses spatial journeying to mythical realms to anchor the narrative in historical past. In *Sula* the title character is a conjure woman of utmost complexity. She is a force portrayed in the context of a black community, the neighbourhood of Bottom, a small river-town in Ohio. Her role as conjure woman is inseparable from her estrangement from the community for ten years. On her return, she is thought to have caused a five year old child to break his leg and to have made an old man choke to death on a chicken bone. To protect themselves from Sula's evil presence, people sprinkle salt on their doorsteps, lay broomsticks across their door at night, and attempt unsuccessfully to "collect the dust from her footsteps" (98).

> The source of Sula's power lies in her acceptance of her own estrangement from time. In her own view, she has "no self to count on . . . no centre, no speck around which to grow . . . no ego". The

> Sula of today bears no relationship to, thus no responsibility for, the Sula of yesterday: Sula exists outside of time. She sees herself as having no continuity in time, she feels, "no compulsion to verify herself - to be consistent with herself". She belongs to the mythical realms. (Harris 106)

Sula accepts and celebrates her own dispossession, and she is seen as shaping the world to match her own fancies. In her characterisation Morrison implies that the conjure woman's disruptive powers spring from her own estrangement from time which she exploits and turns back against the world. Her ten years' exile can be estrangement from the passage of time. When she comes back, "Sula uses sex to anchor herself in time, sleeping freely with other women's husbands, but only once: then she discards them" (Barthold 109). When she makes love she sees herself in "the centre of that silence that was not eternity but the death of time" (*Sula* 105). Lovemaking brings to her not connection with another human being, but the celebration of an estrangement that is powerful enough to

kill time.

Clearly, Sula's celebration of her own estrangement poses a spiritual threat to the community, which in turn, strengthens their potential for good. Because Sula is seen as a threat to children's well-being, even neglectful mothers become solicitous of their children's welfare. When Sula callously puts her grandmother in a nursing home, Bottom augments its reverence for its elder members; When Sula seduces and then discards their husbands, wives take pains to please them.

In the events that follow her death there is an obvious suggestion of Sula's power over time. "It is as though the death mythically triggers a temporal chaos that, living she had kept at bay, a disaster that is catastrophic for the Bottom" (194). In the dislocation that occurs following Sula's death, the seasons go mad, harvests are ruined, chickens killed, and holiday hard cider turns to ice. Sickness follows the untimely freeze crop, scarlet fever, chilblains, rheumatism, pleurisy, earaches, and other ailments. The climax to the season gone mad comes on National Suicide Day when the people of Bottom fulfil Shadrack's call for death, by going deeper and deeper into

the tunnel. The song sung at Sula's burial -- "shall we gather at the river" becomes prophetic. Sula has a power that continues after she dies in a symbolic affirmation of the continuity of past and present (192).

Sula speaks even after her death. She felt her face smiling. "Well, I'll be damned," she thought, "it didn't even hurt. Wait'll I tell Nel" (190).

As in *Sula,* movement in space is a movement back through time in *Song of Solomon* also. The novel centres on Milkman Dead's search for identity. He appears to be doomed to a life of alienation from himself and the Dead family. Like his parents he adheres to excessively rigid, materialistic western values and an attendant linear conception of time. During his journey to his ancestral home, however, Milkman discovers his own capacity for emotional expansiveness, casting off the signs of his material selfishness one by one. He learns to perceive the passage of time as a cyclical process when he incorporates both his familial and personal history into his sense of the present. He recognises the breaks and comprehends for the first time, the need for coherence in his own life, for the lack of which, his friend Guitar accuses him

incessantly.

Before Milkman leaves Michigan, he perceives the world in much the same way as his father does. For instance, his letter to Hagar reveals his inability to understand her feelings and love, despite their years of intimacy:

> Also, I want to thank you. Thank you for all you have meant to me. For making me happy all these years. I am signing this letter with love, of course, but more than that, with gratitude. (99)

When he strikes his father for hitting his mother he is re-enacting the father function and preserving the patriarchal privilege as an adult male to control his women. Lena says to him:

> You have been laughing at us all your life. Corinthian. Mama. Me. Using us, ordering us, and judging us. . . . Our girlhood was spent like a found nickel on you, when you slept, we were quiet; when you were hungry, we cooked; when you wanted to play, we entertained you; and when got grown enough to know the

> difference between a woman and a two-toned fork, everything in this house stopped for you. . . . You have never picked up anything heavier than your own feet, or solved a problem harder than fourth-grade arithmetic. Where do you get the right to decide our lives? . . . you are exactly like him. . . you think because you hit him once that we all believe you were protecting her. Taking her side. It's a lie. You were taking over, letting us know you had the right to tell her and all of us what to do. (215-216)

Song of Solomon blurs the boundaries between the natural and supernatural world. One day, when Milkman stands mindlessly watching his mother in the garden he can not make out whether what he sees is a dream or not.

> Tulips began to grow out of the holes she had dug. First a solitary thin tube of green, then two leaves opened up from the stem -- one on each side. He rubbed

his eyes and looked again. Now several stalks were coming out of the ground behind her. Either they were bulbs she had already planted or they had been in the sack so long they had germinated. The tubes were getting taller and taller and soon there were so many of them, they were pressing against each other and up against his mother's dress. And still she didn't notice them or turn around. She just kept digging. Some of the stems began to sprout heads, bloody red heads that bobbed over and touched her back. Finally she noticed them growing and nodding and touching her. Milkman thought she would jump up in fear -- at least in surprise. But she didn't. she leaned back from them, even hit out at them, but playfully, mischievously. The flowers grew and grew, until he could see only her shoulders above them her

> flailing arms high above those, bobbing, snapping heads. They were smothering her, taking away her breath with their soft jagged lips. And she nearly smiled and fought them off as though they were harmless butterflies. . . . Eventually they covered her and all he could see was a mound of tangled tulips bent low over her body which was kicking to the last. (105)

Milkman consistently fails to recognise the possibility of ghosts. Freddie's claim that his mother dies of ghosts only elicits Milkman's laughter. Later he does not believe his own senses when the ghost of his paternal grandfather witnesses Milkman's and Guitar's attempt to steal Pilate's 'gold' -- actually the bones of the grandfather. Even when face to face with a ghost, Milkman remains unbelieving. Having arrived in Danville, Pennsylvania, and trying to discover where Circe lives, Milkman encounters "a sweet spicy perfume. Like ginger root -- pleasant, clean, seductive" (241). From this dream-like encounter with a woman who, as Milkman notes, " had to be

dead" (243), he gets the names of his paternal grandparents.

Like many of Morrison's other characters Milkman also suffers from a fundamental form of alienation. He is saved by the basic myths that acclematise the isolated individual in the salubrious communal environment. Morrison has said that the presence of the 'ancestor' in the city can change an urban wasteland into a real community ("City Limits" 39). She says that when the past is linked with the present, the basic myths reappear, myths that deal with identity, values and love. As Charles Scruggs observes, "the problem of *Song of Solomon* is that the past is already present in the present, but the characters don't see it" (313). Except Pilate all the other characters want to forget the painful past. Milkman's grandfather Jake gets his name changed from Jake Macon Dead by a drunken yankee soldier who, working for the Freedman's Bureau, confused Jake's place of birth and Solomon's death with Jake's name. Encouraged by his wife, Jake accepts his new name because after the civil war he wanted a new start -- he wanted to escape the past, which he identified with slavery.

In *Song of Solomon*, myth dominates the text. The novel

is intricately woven with African folktales, biblical allusions and magical events. This novel is also historical, not in terms of its temporal remoteness from the present, but in its relating of the fictional lives of the characters to the social and political world of their time.

Song of Solomon begins with the reportage of the North Carolina Mutual Life Insurance agent's promise to fly from Mercy Hospital to the other side of Lake Superior at 3 o' clock. The connection is easily made with the mythical Solomon/Shalimar, the flying African, who flew from slavery back to his African home.

Milkman Dead, whose search for identity eventually shapes the novel, has an inexplicable fascination for flight. It is significant to note that Robert Smith's abortive attempt to fly from the hospital roof precipitated Milkman's birth.

Macon Dead Jr., Milkman's father, orphaned and disinherited in his adolescence is a self-made man.

> Macon predicates his behaviour on a linear conception of time. To his mind, future successes determine identity and

> justify one's action in the past and in the present. Macon's futuristic, linear vision of time and of identity is evidenced by his failure to consider his past as part of himself. He denies the importance of his relationship with his sister and of their shared past. Moreover, as he remarks while telling Milkman about his days in Lincoln's Heaven, he does not even allow himself to think about his past. (Smith 280)

In contrast to Macon's vision, his sister Pilate's vision of time is cyclical and expansive. Pilate lacks a navel and that makes her determined to live according to a very different set of values. Estranged from society, she "embodies a mythic hero" (Willis 313). Instead of repressing the past, she carries it with her in the form of her songs, her stories and her bag of bones which Macon mistakes to be gold. She believes that identity is rooted in the capacity to recognize and enliven the past and to synthesize it with the present. She says to Macon:

> You can't take a life and walk off and leave it. Life is life, precious. And the dead you kill is yours. They stay with you any way, in your mind. So it's a better thing, a more better thing to have the bones right there with you where ever you go. That way it frees up your mind. (212)

Milkman embarks on a quest for his past. For him, "the past is a riddle, a reality locked in the verses of a children's song whose meaning is no longer explicit because time has separated the words from their historical context" (Willis 316). His journey through geographical space becomes his journey back through time to the very beginning of his/story. Even while the narrative moves forward through time tracing the lives of the Deads and the people around them, the narrator backtracks through personal histories and circles back again to the present. In various ways each of the chapters replicates the narrative process of a backward motion and a new beginning without completing both threads. This disrupts the flow of the story with chapters and subsections that begin in a new

place, indicating new time, not chronologically subsequent to what has come immediately before.

In tracing his roots from the Detroit Ghetto where he was familiar with Pilate's version of the song of Solomon, he moves to Pennsylvania where his father grew up as an orphan, to Shalimar in Virginia where his grand father Jake Macon was born and where children still sing the song about Solomon's flight to Africa. Milkman's journey ends where the history of his race begins. Though Milkman's journey ends with his coming into close contact with slavery, Morrison transforms it through the myth of the Africans flying into liberation. According to Susan Willis,

> The fact that geographic space functions for history is symptomatic of a time when a people's past no longer forms a continuity with the present. . . . In Morrison's *Song of Solomon*, as in Peruvian Mario Vargas Llosa's *La Casa Verde*, the synchronic relationship defined in geographic space stands for a diachronic relationship. The most interesting feature about these

> texts is that, in reading them, the reader too, like Milkman, restores diachrony to the text, and, in so doing, realises the historical dialectic that the text presents as inaccessible. (316-317)

Milkman gains an integral vision of past and present through his journey to his mythical origins. On a trip to Georgia which he takes as a young man, Milkman has a series of epiphanies which reveal to him both the flaws in his father's materialistic dreams and the value of those of Pilate's. In the early part of the Georgia trip, Milkman's assimilation of Macon's values is apparent. As he nears his grandfather's original property and the cave in which Macon believes bags of gold are hidden, Milkman "smelled money, although it was not a smell at all" (250). Exulting in the treasure he expects to find, he thinks, "To win. There was nothing like it in the world" (251). When he leaves Georgia, however, he experiences his first epiphany as he realises his true motives for wanting the lost gold. He understands that "all the fine reasons for wanting it didn't mean a thing" (252). For the first time, Milkman realises that he is acting out of his father's competitive

success motives.

However, Milkman is not immediately affected by his revelation. When he reaches Shalimar, Virginia, his arrogant manner insults the men there and "they looked at his skin and saw it was as black as theirs, but they knew he had the heart of the white men who came to pick them up . . . when they needed anonymous, faceless labourers"(265). Milkman accepts their invitation to go hunting, an expedition which proves to be a ritualistic initiation into a journey to the remote mythic past in search of his own identity. Elizabeth B. House observes:

> The hunt itself operates on several levels. On one, the men are hunting animals. On another, Milkman is being stalked by a forever friend who thinks Milkman has cheated him out of the gold and who intends to kill him. Finally, Milkman is hunting for his own true identity, his own dreams. Thinking over his precious position, Macon's son at first decides that he deserves neither the town men's contempt nor his

> friend's vengeance. . . . Examining his values, then, Milkman realises that in this primitive situation far from his father's successes, "there was nothing here to help him -- not his money, his car, his father's reputation, his suit or his shoes. In fact they hampered him" (277).

He finally understands how unessential competitive rewards are and how much he needs human ties.

Exhilarated by his new understanding, Milkman walks to meet the other hunters, and now, rid of his arrogance and dependence on his father's values, he does not limp. He is stripped of all the symbols of the dominant culture.

Significantly, Milkman begins to decipher the children's song and finds in it the narrative of his family. It is the story of the flying African, Solomon, who discovers his magical power and flies from slavery back to his African home. Solomon left behind his wife, Ryna and twenty one children, including Jake, Milkman's grandfather. Ryna goes mad over the loss of her husband, and her children are cared for by a surrogate mother, Heddy.

Trudier Harris observes that,

> The men (Solomon, Jake, Macon, Milkman) seek power, either magical or material; the women (Ryna, Sing, Ruth, Hagar) must suffer for this pursuit; the children are abandoned because of it, but they are saved by a surrogate mother (Heddy, Circe, Pilate) who keeps alive the history for whoever might later need it. It is also preserved as a functional part of the community, in children's songs. (206)

The random elements of the past become a coherent family story. Milkman now understands why Pilate keeps the bones of the dead man. He decides to keep the box of Hagar's hair. Finally, it does not matter whether Milkman survives the fight with Guitar:

> "You want my life?" Milkman was not shouting now. "You need it? Here." Without wiping away the tears, taking a deep breath over, even bending his knees -- he leaped. As fleet and bright

> as a load star. He wheeled toward Guitar and it did not matter which of them would give up his ghost in the killing arms of his brother. For now he knew what Shalimar knew. If you surrendered to the air, you could ride it. (337)

Song of Solomon communicates the conviction about the possibility of transcendence within human life. It becomes a painful necessity when a people's present no longer forms a continuity with their past. Geographic space functions for history, the retention of which is symptomatic of resistance to various kinds of attempts at dispossession.

While for Lessing a journey to the realms of myth and archetype is an escape from the blinders of conventional ideology, for Morrison, it is a claiming back what the African American has lost.

Squaring the Circle : Attempts at Breaking Genre

P.S. Jaya “Fiction, form and resistance: A study of the novels of Doris Lessing and Toni Morrison” Thesis. Department of English , University of Calicut, 2001

Chapter IV Squaring the Circle: Attempts at Breaking Genre

Genre ceases to be a separating category in the works of Doris Lessing and Toni Morrison. The critique of essentialism, which is central to their writing, not only challenges the reader's notions of personal or social identity, but also the notions of genre identity. This challenging of genre identity questions the notions of generic purity associated with the traditional distinctions between genres. Lessing and Morrison take up the challenge of working out the problematics of the borders, boundaries and frameworks that structure generic identities. To break down these structures is to breach the walls of containment and categorization. The challenge towards the traditional and dominant ideology that the literary canon promotes through its assumption of fixed genre, points to the dangers of framing or containing and questions the ways in which identities are categorized:

> Because systems of classification in literature begin with a notion of certain canonical forms and then work outward to account for even the most unruly texts, that can never be precise enough. All literary taxonomies tend to lose clarity at the edges and relegate certain border line phenomena to anomaly. Since the classification of rebellious texts can in this way easily run into repression, literary taxonomy shall be looked upon warily by the feminists or otherwise politically committed critics. (Kaminsky 60-61)

Thus, the breaking down of genres problematises the assumption of an objective and impersonal critical stance. To the marginalized the very status of genre becomes a complicity of strategies, there seems to be a dubiousness inherent in a rubric that sets up categories.

Forms that are characterized by the blurring and merging of distinctions impart to the writer freedom from the constraints of normative or oppressive social frames and

structures. It makes possible "a standing aside not only from one's own social position, but from all social positions and of formulating a potentially unlimited series of alternative social arrangements" (Turner 13-14).

Disruption of genre is of particular relevance to the marginalized text, which fuses "discourse and body" in a rejection of genre limitations. Most literary genres are, after all, as Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar observe, essentially male devised, by male authors to tell male stories about the world (67).

> There exists a need to break out of what many women writers believe are the rules of somebody else's game. Furthermore, generic distinctions such as those of Hayden White between history ('discourse of the real') and narrative fiction ('discourse of desire') are all untenable when we reflect upon much of the male-authored historical or the fictional discourse written about women: too often it is neither real nor in any way desirable. This is a ponderous

> realization for every woman writer, especially an ethnic woman writer, who, again too often, has been caged up in just such a generic double bind. What should she do? Logically (or perhaps with creative illogic), our writers have overlapped and mixed up their discourse in order to make history more real and fiction more desirable from their point of view. (Ordonez 20)

Through oral sources, as well as through letters, journals, memoirs and tales, the marginalized woman writer breaks out of genre/gender restrictions to allow for revisionist readings of her past, and she frees up textual energy for the reshaping of her future. To quote Kvale,

> The postmodern novel is characterized by pastiche and collage. It does not belong to a unitary frame of reference. The plurality of perspective leads to a fragmentation of experience; the collage becoming a key artistic technique of our time. (23)

The breaking of the boundaries that separate genres and leave the structures dissolved or ruptured, takes the writing to the realm of the fantastic. One of the defining characteristics of fantasy is its tendency to dissolve structures, to move towards an ideal of indifferentiation. The fantastic makes an assault upon genre fortification with far-reaching consequences in terms of interrogating the process of its construction. It is precisely this subversion of genre identity, which constitutes the most radical transgressive function of the fantastic:

> Modern fantasy makes explicit attraction towards an entropic state. It is, perhaps, at its most extreme . . . an absolute blurring of identities, a promiscuity (i.e. a mixed, disordered, indiscriminate, heterogeneous disunity) . . . longs for a combination of species, where gender and genre would cease to be separating categories. (Jackson 73)

According to Fredric Jameson, "genres are essentially literary institutions or social contracts between a writer and a specific public, whose function is to specify the

proper use of a particular artefact" (*The Political Unconscious* 106). Both Lessing and Morrison refuse to acknowledge any such contract, which would strengthen societal constraints.

Doris Lessing's aggressive writing serves to challenge the essentialism of genre identity. In her interview with Stephen Gray, Lessing says:

> But what I am interested in, you see, is breaking down these forms that we set up for ourselves -- you know, you have to have a novel, and there is a poem there, and a short story there, and there is an essay there. Why does it have to be like that? Because some of the great books, for example, of the Middle East, are just compendiums of all kinds of things, and they are rich. (*Putting* 115)

As early as *The Golden Notebook*, Lessing was questioning the adequacy of realism to do justice to experience through fiction. *The Golden Notebook* is an extraordinarily radical experiment in structure which

anticipates Lessing's later novelistic challenges to realism from *Briefing for a Descent into Hell* to *The Memoirs of a Survivor* and finally to the science fiction of the later period. *Briefing for a Descent into Hell,* with its epitaph, 'Category: Inner Space Fiction: For there is nowhere to go but in', makes Lessing's intentions obvious. She incorporates into that novel elements that are usually associated with the genres such as fantasy, romance and science fiction.

Built into the structure of *The Golden Notebook,* is a critique of traditional realism, which involves more than mere alterations to the basic ideology of language as a transparent medium, and fiction as a representation of some objective reality. Lessing argued in her preface to a later edition of *The Golden Notebook* that the changing nature of human experience creates a need for new fictional forms.

Lessing's intentions in writing *The Golden Notebook* was that it should make its own comment about the conventional novel.

> To put the short novel, *Free Women,* as a summary and condensation of all that mass of material, was to say something

> about the conventional novel, another way of describing the dissatisfaction of a writer when something is finished: 'How little I have caught of all that complexity; how can this small neat thing be true when what I have felt, experienced, was so rough and apparently formless and unshaped. . . . My major aim was to shape a book which would make its own comment, a wordless statement: to talk through the way it was shaped. (Preface to *GN* 13)

The Golden Notebook epitomized a phase of the post-modernist concern about the novel form. Lessing wanted a new form because she found that the old one could not accommodate her multi-layered version of reality. *The Golden Notebook* is a radical examination of the novel form, and Lessing's later novels incorporate some of the results of this experiment, namely, the inadequacy of conveying the non-rational, non logical modes of thought in the confines of one particular genre. As Lorna Sage puts it:

> Because Lessing has found a form that so exactly focused Lessing's struggle with/against realism, it was a novel that persuaded its readers of the limitations of that shared language more painfully, and even perhaps more intimately, than French new novels, or than anti- realist writings from America. Sarrante and Robbe-Grillet began from the culture of the unreal, the sub-real; Barth and Pynchon were reflexive jokers from the start. But Lessing worked her passage, as it were, and documented the voyage. And the result was that she did what many of her experimental contemporaries claimed, but failed to do -- produced a novel that unravelled itself in its readers' responses in altogether unexpected ways. She had 'represented' them better than she knew. (56)

The search for a different method for communicating

the complex nature of consciousness itself led Lessing to change the form of fiction in order to conceptualise her subject. Midway through her career, with the publication of *The Golden Notebook*, Lessing began to consciously deviate from realistic modes of writing. She describes *The Golden Notebook* as her attempt to "break a form, to break certain forms of consciousness and go beyond them" (4).

In *The Golden Notebook*, Doris Lessing shows the effect that the chaotic experience of twentieth century political and social upheaval has on individuals, giving particular attention to possible consequences to the artist as an archetypal image of the creative individual. Lessing's innovative fragmentation of structure in the novel includes a parody of the inadequacy of the realistic novel, Free Women, to say anything, and becomes an exploration of the absurdities of trying to report neutrally and objectively about the world around oneself through diaries or newspaper cuttings. Though the struggle of Anna for a new kind of experience, meaningfulness, both in life and literature, is shown to inhere not so much in ideas or plots or events, the novel gains considerably in openness and flexibility of structure employed to express those ideas.

Lessing seeks to escape what she seeks as the imprisoning, confining effects of artistic forms that have become conventional stereotypes, such as the realist novel and the conventional forms of narratives.

The Golden Notebook is framed by a short novel, called *Free Women*, which is a conventional and realistic piece. Still it is not a presentation of what is supposed to be reality, but Anna Wulf's fictional account of possible adverse consequences that would befall her should fragmentation and fear of chaos continue to govern people like herself and her friends, and threaten the next generation. There are five sections entitled 'Free Women', written in the third person restricted point of view of Anna Wulf. These sections are interspersed throughout the novel, these sections can stand by themselves as a free independent novel.

What Lessing does not disclose until page 642 of the novel is that the fragmented sections called, Free Women constitute the novel Anna subsequently writes.

> It is a fiction based on the fragmented lives of herself and her friends, but altered to demonstrate the danger of

> simply repeating cyclically their patterns of disintegration, rather than breaking out of those forms of consciousness. Doris Lessing has broken the apparent form of the novel, that implied everything was real. (Lightfoot 280)

Anna's words, "real experience can't be described"(71) make no pretension that the novels she writes are real.

Four notebooks follow the seemingly conventional sections of Free Women. The central character of Free Women, Anna Wulf keeps four notebooks because she recognizes that she has to separate things off from each other, out of fear of chaos, formlessness, and break down. The notebooks cover the years from 1950 to 1957. The initial 'Free Women' section is followed by excerpts from the Black, Red, Yellow, and Blue notebooks, in that order, as though they are explaining the past in order to provide a background for an understanding of the present, the subjective style contrasting with the ironic objective style. While the selections from the notebooks have been written since the beginning of the 1950s, some recount earlier events or, fictional ones. They generally proceed

in chronological order, but the excerpts do not cover exactly the same dates, though they tend to deal with the same era.

The four sections of the Black notebook together can be read as the memoir of a writer about the various problems she faced in her career. It is a record of Anna's life as an artist. It recounts her memories of her experiences in Africa. Moreover it discusses her first novel, *Frontiers of War*, also parodied as *Forbidden Love*, records sources, reviews, parodies, business matters related to 'real' and fictional events and contains newspaper cuttings.

The Black Notebook's title - 'dark' - appears at the centre of the page. The pages are divided into two by a black vertical line. On the left side of the line appears the sub-title 'source' and on the right is written, 'money'. Under the section 'money' comes the actual business transactions concerned with the publication of Anna's novel *The Frontiers of War*. 'Source' is Anna's recollection of the real experiences which she fictionalized in *The Frontiers of War*.

This section also contains Anna's very serious

reflections on the state of art. She remarks that the function of the novel is changing. It is becoming "an outpost of journalism" (60). She evaluates that only one novel in a thousand now has the quality of philosophy, which is the test of real art. However, she feels incapable of writing " the only kind of novel which interests me: a book powered with an intellectual or moral passion strong enough to create order, to create a new way of looking at life."

The 'Source' portion of the Black Notebook shows Anna's criticism of her own novel *Frontiers of War*, which she despises for its acute neurosis and " terribly lying nostalgia" (*GN* 63). The novel depicts Anna's life with a small group of young activists in central Africa. Now when she reflects on that she finds that the core of her memory is not the race problem, which becomes the crux of the novel, but the complex interrelationships among the members of the group. She amazes herself by the discrepancy between what she had remembered through the " subjective, highly-coloured mist" (120) of life in her twenties and the facts she now perceives. "The two stories have nothing at all in common" (52). As she probes further, she feels that the

fault is not with the content, but with the medium. She is convinced that the material is best suited for a film or a painting, not a novel.

The Black Notebook contains a full length short story written by Anna's friend James Schaffer. It is titled "Blood on the Banana Leaves". This story is followed by three full length reviews of Anna's novel *The Frontiers of War*, which appeared in three different journals. With the narration of a dream the Black Notebook concludes.

The Red Notebook provides the history of Anna's political life. It is a record of Anna's involvement with the British Communist Party. Her attitude towards the party is ambiguous even to herself. She confesses that there were always two personalities in her, the 'communist' and 'Anna', and Anna judged the communist all the time and vice-versa. She notes that she writes very little in the Red Notebook and that all her notes are very critical of the party. Later, she confesses that she joined the party out of "a need for wholeness, an end to the split, divided, unsatisfactory way we all live" (161): yet the split get intensified. Constant association with other

comrades isolates and further fragments her life. She feels that political language is the most meaningless utterance.

The Yellow Notebook contains both serious attempts at fiction and parodies of various styles. The first three sections of the Yellow notebook chiefly contain a novel called *The Shadow of the Third*, which Anna does not intend to publish, for it too suggests chaos, the protagonist Ella is writing a novel about a young man who commits suicide. Ella and her friend Julia are free women who are fictional versions of the archetype to which Anna and Molly belong, the creative individual. Through a distanced, projected fictional type of herself, Anna can express her painful relations with men, her death wish, her artistic sensibility, and the creation of 'a shadow of a third' -- the image of the person she wants to be (*GN* 459-60). In her life, as in her fiction, Anna makes up stories to avoid confronting the truth, which she fears is chaos.

The fourth section of the Yellow Notebook contains eighteen short stories. The Yellow Notebook is a literary pastiche in which Lessing, through her protagonist Anna, and Anna through her protagonist Ella, experiments with various styles of writings. The Yellow Notebook ends with

a series of outlines for short stories and novels reflecting Anna's need for love.

The Blue Notebook can be read as an autobiography. It holds Anna's account of her personal life: her relationship with her child Janet, to whom she tells stories about Janet, and her relations with friends, associates and lovers. This book too includes parodies, newspaper accounts of what is going on in the world at large. It is in the form of a diary. All sections have dated entries. At one point the diary stops, but the narrative continues in the form of cuttings of news items in which Anna has a personal interest. These are again followed by diary entries. In the last part of the third section of the Blue Notebook, Anna says that she expected it to be the most truthful of the notebooks; but confesses that it happened to be worse than all other notebooks.

The fourth section of the Blue Notebook is undated as if Anna understands that even if she tries to record events separately in notebooks, under various titles and dates, everything is bound to end up in chaos.

The pattern of the Free Women section being followed by excerpts from each of the four notebooks is repeated four

times. It is only then that the Golden Notebook section appears, written in the first person by Anna Wulf, and dealing with the events of 1957. The book ends with a final section of Free Women.

> In *The Golden Notebook* we see the novelist writing a novel (Doris Lessing on Anna Wulf) about a novelist writing two novels (the 'real' Anna on Ella and on a 'fictional' Anna). These two novels, respectively, are about a novelist writing a novel (Ella's book on a man who commits suicide) and also about a novelist not writing a novel (the 'fictional' Anna who remains blocked). (Lightfoot 280-81)

These images, seemingly produced by two mirrors facing each other, are not merely a narcissistic version of novel. In the beginning of *The Golden Notebook*, Anna says: "The point is that as far as I can see everything is cracking up"(8).

The Free Women section of *The Golden Notebook* is a conventional novel, but the book as whole is about the

inadequacy of the conventional novel in that it is about the complexity that has to be rendered down finally into a fixed form.

Lessing wrote *The Golden Notebook* half way through the series Children of Violence: "life is too complex ever to be put into words. That's one thing I was saying through the structure of this book" (Lessing, Interview 90). *The Golden Notebook* is a challenge to established demarcations of genre. This book contains everything in it from the germs of stories to complete stories, and to parallel stories. Here Lessing is exploding the novel form open. The excitement of *The Golden Notebook* is that it always seems to be recreated with every reading.

The Golden Notebook's heroine Anna Wulf is of the opinion that the novel today is an outpost of journalism and its function, in a closed world, is to supply one segment of the society with information about another. She contends that a novel should have 'a quality of philosophy' (222).

Anna seems to have a fundamental distrust of her medium as far as what words in a particular form can do. Anna is a free woman, an expatriated African colonial, a

communist, an advocate of free love, and a psychoanalytic patient. She moves in the world of Marxists, radicals, artists and intellectuals of 1950s. Her world is a microcosm of the chaos and uncertainty of contemporary life. Her problems -- existential agony, sexual frustration, alienation, insecurity, writer's block, crises of conscience, nervous failures -- are its features. She cannot offer the coherent vision or unified perspective, which her art, she feels, demands. When Molly asks what Anna's four notebooks contain, she replies, "chaos, that is the point"(41).

Each of Anna's notebooks can be read as a separate short story. Each notebook represents a different fictional or critical perspective through which Anna's life and her approach to art is revealed. The common feature in all these notebooks is Anna's desperate attempt to come to terms with the disintegrating world. Often we see the same incident recorded in two different ways in two different books. When Anna parts with Michael, a fictionalized version of it appears in the Yellow Notebook, and a naturalistic version on the Blue. Towards the end of the novel one understands that the notebooks are Anna's artistic

and critical experiments for the novel she intends to write.

Towards the end, Anna's Black Notebook becomes simply a montage of newspaper clippings. The Red Notebook also is not different. The Yellow Notebook degenerates into a jumble of short story plots and a final pastiche, while the Blue Notebook is the record of her descent/ascent into madness.

One day, during a brief period of lucidity, Anna goes to market and sees a thick notebook with a golden cover. She buys it in the hope of coalescing all of her in it, keeping only that instead of the four notebooks. Thus she puts aside Black, Red, Yellow and Blue notebooks, which have become highly chaotic by now, and decides to write only in the Golden Notebook. The gesture seems to be symbolic and is hoped to put an end to her fragmentation and chaos. But instead of a beautifully recorded, rationally well-made fiction that Anna expects, the Golden Notebook is full of precisely that chaos she is afraid of. The Golden Notebook portion ends with Saul and Anna going their separate ways, he writes his book, and she, hers. Saul dictates to her the first sentence of her novel," The two women were alone in the London flat", and this is the

sentence with which *The Golden Notebook* begins.

In her important preface to *The Golden Notebook*, Lessing writes that if "*The Golden Notebook* were shaped in the right way, it would make its own comment about the conventional novel. . . . My major aim was to shape a book which would make its own comment, a wordless statement: to talk through the way it was shaped" (XIII-XIV). The structure of the text, therefore, is a statement of how it is to be read. Published thirteen years after *The Golden Notebook*, *The Memoirs* is another novel in which Lessing exhibits her fascination with complex narrative forms.

In *The Golden Notebook* Anna remarks that "the novel has become a function of the fragmented society, the fragmented consciousness" (112). *The Memoirs of a Survivor* is the narrative glimpse of a fragmented consciousness - of society and individual. *The Memoirs* invites the reader to establish connections throughout the process of reading. The meaning of the narrative is the readers' experience of the fragmented consciousness, of the form/formlessness through which such fragments communicate.

At a 'rational' or 'realistic' level, *The Memoirs* appears to belong to the genre of futurist or science fiction. It

is ordered sequentially. At sometime in the future, civilization declines exponentially into barbarism. A class of administrators feed on a middle-class population, snatching for themselves all the services and privileges once shared democratically. Gangs of roving youngsters pillage and then abandon the unnamed city, ultimately forcing the older inhabitants to run away. In an area, which still marginally operates, lives the unnamed narrator, who one day receives a visitor. A middle-aged man entrusts into her care a twelve year-old girl, Emily Cartright, and her mongrel Hugo, and then disappears. All wait for the end as gangs move into the streets and are supplemented by hordes of cannibalistic children.

The first person narrator, who is the implied author, survives as the title of the book indicates. Her memory constitutes the text. However, it is a memory that invents and imagines as much as it recalls and retells.

The inventions of the narrator may seem at first to be merely the ancient device of a story within a story. But the inner story soon begins to overflow, to fill the whole book. A wall in the narrator's ground floor flat dissolves to disclose remote scenes, which she and the reader enter

and try to comprehend. This device of revelation also seems a conventional technique employed in supernatural fiction. The narrator is reluctant to believe what she sees: ". . . . to be precise, what I was hearing was impossible"(8), and "perhaps it was more of a feeling than something seen" (8). But soon she admits the existence of another dimension. She remarks: "All this time my ordinary life was the foreground, the lit area . . . of a mystery that was taking place, and had been going on for a long time, somewhere else"(4).

The Memoirs is at once a historical novel and an intense psychological story as it is a science fiction. The novel has a first person narrator who is anonymous and known to the reader only through her narration. She is writing a memoir, which is the record of two planes of consciousness. Yet she claims to be writing a 'history'. Towards the middle of the narrative, the narrator says: "this is history, after all, and I hope a truthful one"(138). This overt labelling of the narrative as 'history' raises questions of genre, which seriously affects the reader's notion of genre distinctions. The narrator claims her narrative to be 'history', the time of

which is in the future, a time prior to the time of the reading.

As Bertelsen points out, instead of 'Memoirs', Lessing had first titled the novel a 'Journal'. Both possibilities focus attention on the text as document, the consciously written object, but a journal signifies a degree of simultaneity between the time of fiction and the time of the narration, while *The Memoirs* is written from a retrospective point of view. It is the Survivor's account.

> 'History' connotes in *The Memoirs* not a sense of something past, but a way of reading in which actions or events have a 'predestined significance'. This sense of historical inevitability, fused with the future world of *The Memoirs* must undergird any reading of *The Memoirs* if Lessing's vision of future history is to be perceived. (36)

Though Doris Lessing seeks to redefine the confines of genres, she never oversteps the boundaries of literature to other art forms. However, Toni Morrison is never satisfied

with the expansion of the contours of literary genres. To re-imagine the lost history of her people, Morrison seeks the oral tradition, its music, which, for her, gives voice. This making of identity is overtly political.

In Morrison, the refusal of ready-made terms, and the responsibility it entails, plays itself out through other forms of writing and of art. In *The Bluest Eye*, Claudia says:

> The pieces of Cholly's life could become coherent only in the head of a musician. Only those who talk through the gold of the curved metal, or in the touch of black -and- white rectangles and taut skins and strings echoing from wooden corridors could give true form to his life. Only they would know how to connect the heart of a red watermelon to the asafoetida bag to the flash light on his behind to the fists of money to the lemonade in a Mason jar to a man called Blue and come up with what all that meant in joy, in pain, in anger, in love, in hatred and give

> it its final and pervading ache of freedom. Only a musician would sense, realize, know, without even knowing that he knew, that, that Cholly was free. Dangerously free. (125)

As Ordonez says,

> All the cross-ethnic models exhibit, to a greater or lesser degree, the mixing of genre and discourse. Bi-cultural life experiences cannot be contained within the limits of literary dictates. (20)

Opting for one pure generic form will be too restrictive to contain the dynamic and the dialectical experience of being black in America, and lending auto-biographical recollections and history with one's own original versions of folk-tale, myth and legend.

Morrison found it difficult as she was caught between the contradictions of dreaming about endless flight of narrative desires and freedom and still painfully cropped and imprisoned in traditionally set frames. Her narratives enmesh the reader in the textual ambivalences and enable her/him to participate in a revision of the duality of past

history.

Though having a less mixture of genres, Toni Morrison's *Sula* goes beyond the conventional format of novel and short story to give the feel of historic discourse as well. The narrative divisions of *Sula* are marked with dates creating the palpable fiction that Sula, Nel, and the historical evolution of their community -- Bottom -- really existed in time and space. There is also much that comes from oral history like the dream readings of Eva Peace.

Trudier Harris explores the fairy tale pattern in *Sula:*

> With the creation of Bottom in *Sula,* Toni Morrison removes that grounding in a known place and locates her characters in a territory that invites the the fantastic and the mythical as easily as the realistic. In the political-racial -economic confrontation surrounding its creation, the Bottom differs from other fictional communities; it was concocted out of hope, belief and power of dreams

> to transcend the harshness of the real world. It lends itself, therefore, much much more readily to occurrences that are strange or fantastic and to characters who are at times more nether creatures than flesh and blood. (29)

Sula opens with the formulaic opening of fairy tales from white culture. In the first paragraph of the novel, Morrison establishes an almost mythic status for Bottom. It claims kinship with the many places in which strange, almost supernatural incidents have occurred. The opening of the novel deviates little from the 'once upon a time' formula for fairy tales:

> In that place where they tore the nightshade and blackberry patches from their roots to make room for the Medallion City Golf Course, there was a neighbourhood. (3)

The fictional reality of Bottom is thus juxtaposed with the lack of reality of those never-never lands. But it is quickly discovered that the wondrous occurrences which the fairy tale formula promise gives way to a series of

reversals.

Beloved also renders an incident in history. The historical basis for *Beloved* is a news article, which appeared in *The Black Book*, edited by Toni Morrison, that records around three hundred years of black history. "A Visit to the Slave Mother Who Killed Her Child" is the piece of history which informs both the theme and narrative process of *Beloved*. As Marilyn Sanders Mobley puts it,

> . . . *Beloved* dramatizes the complex relationship between history and memory by shifting from lived experience as documented in *The Black Book* to remembered experience as represented in the novel. (357)

It is the account of a runaway slave from Kentucky, named Margaret Garner. When she realizes she is about to be captured in accordance with the Fugitive Slave Law, she kills her child to save it from the slave's destiny. Slave narrative as a genre begins with the African American literary tradition. In order to enter into the hermeneutic circle of this novel, it is necessary to probe the intra

textual relationship between the slave narrative and the novel. But even while using the slave narrative, Morrison mixes genres by using memory to explore the interior life and represent dimensions of slave life that the classic slave narrative omitted. Morrison makes the problem of slavery a fresh, immediate memory rather than a remote historical experience which has now become a museum piece. It provides a form of narrative intervention, which disrupts the pattern of the old slave narratives. Thus, while the slave narrative characteristically moves in a chronological, linear narrative fashion, *Beloved* meanders spirally out of time and space. It challenges the western notion of linear time that informs American history and the slave narratives. Unlike the slave narrative, which sought to be all-inclusive eyewitness accounts of the material conditions of slavery, Morrison's novel exposes the unsaid of the narratives, the psychic subtexts that lie within and beneath the historical facts.

The Bluest Eye accomplishes a critique of received norms of beauty and morality through its structural affinity with jazz practice, which insists on overstepping conventional boundaries.

Morrison has made use of folk traditions to expand our expectations of what a novel should be and should do. Black folk culture is indisputably linked with black history and oral forms of expressions that have developed over that history. These forms mainly comprise blues, jazz, spirituals, sermons and toasts. Morrison has commented to McKay in an interview that she wants her novels to be like jazz:

> Jazz keeps you on the edge. There is no final chord. . . . There is always something else that you want from the music. I want my books to be like that -because I want that feeling of something held in reserve and the sense that there is more - that you can't have it all right now. . . . They will never fully satisfy - never fully. (429)

In his book, *Blues People: Negro Music in White America*, Baraka argues that the creative impulse in black music has always been one of resistance. The meaning of the music is to be found in its origin in an oppressed social class and in its history of challenging European and

American musical conventions (55-56). The roots of blues and jazz as well as the meaning of the music lie in the social and political struggles of the black American to escape slavery and oppression. Morrison finds in the music the black's struggle for cultural self-awareness which is always threatened by the pervasive power of white controlled cultural institutions. African musical qualities such as polyrhythm, polyphony, syncopation and improvisation have survived and indeed flourished in black American music. As Balliet says, authentic black music can only function as a form of resistance, as a protest against the social injustices of American society (84). Through its subversion of traditional cultural categories, it reshapes aesthetic and social boundaries. To Gunther Sculler, a noted composer and jazz historian, jazz possesses a unique capacity for individual and collective expression. It gives the notion of thematic and structural unity (94).

Morrison has applied the structure of jazz to as early a novel as *The Bluest Eye*, which launches a critique of received norms of beauty and morality. The novel accomplishes this in part through its structural affinity to jazz, in particular with a jazz practice which insists

on overstepping conventional boundaries.

The leaping and lingering of the narrative suggests the jazz structuring in *Sula*. The theme of death has many variations and improvisations upon it as Morrison manifests its meaning for various characters:

> Death is the subtle point of this jazz composition, the centre to which each year returns in spite of its individual departure. This allowance for individuality within an overall structure contrasts sharply with what is possible for Sula in the Bottom; the community would prefer that she play the straight refrain of the blues rather than the creative deviation allowable with the jazz composition. (Harris 59)

Morrison's sixth novel *Jazz* (1992) is a literary improvisation, which has received great critical acclaim. Morrison talks at length about the structure of the novel:

> . . . the jazz like structure wasn't a secondary thing for me - it was the raison d'etre of the book. The process

> of trial and error by which the narrator revealed the plot was as important and exciting to me as telling the story . . . . I was very conscious in writing *Jazz*, of trying to blend that which is contrived and artificial with improvisation. I thought of myself as like the jazz musician: someone who practises and practises and practises in order to be able to invent and to make his art look effortless and graceful. I was always conscious of the constructed aspect of the writing process, and that art appears natural and elegant only as a result of constant practice and awareness of it formal structures. (111)

Morrison's *Jazz* is structured round a central premise of discontinuity. In fact not only does the novel *Jazz* render a fragmented community interconnected within disunified times and distances, Morrison also effectively exploits traditionally Euro-centric and male notions of

history to render a version of fictional reality which maintains feminist undertones.

> In *Jazz*, as with Morrison's previous novels, history is depicted as distinctly feminine. The novel narrates the histories of Joe Trace, his wife Violet and Dorcas, Joe's eighteen year old lover. (Gates 92)

As in the first novel, *The Bluest Eye*, the opening paragraph of *Jazz* provides a lush précis of the whole plot:

> Sth, I know that woman. She used to live with a flock of birds on Lenox Avenue. Know her husband, too. He fell for an eighteen-year-old girl with one of those deep down, spooky loves that made him so sad and happy he shot her just to keep the feeling going. When the woman, her name is Violet, went to the funeral to see the girl and to cut her dead face they threw her to the floor and out of the church. She ran, then, through all

> that snow, and when she got back to her apartment she took the birds from their cages and set them out the windows to freeze or fly, including the parrot that said, "I love you". (3)

The epigrammatic melody exactly resembles the trumpeter's hurrying silver tone, the shy, jumping attack, the rhythmic bobbing and weaving, filling a note to bursting and letting it float smartly away (Dizzy 48). The reader listens to this 'mute' as to somebody who is singing in the neighbourhood. Morrison explains:

> This seemed to be a suitable technique for *Jazz* because I thought of plot in the novel - the threesome - as the melody of the piece, and it is fine to follow a melody - to feel the satisfaction of recognizing a melody whenever the narrator returns to it. That was the real art of the enterprise for me: bumping up against that melody time and again, seeing it from another point of view, seeing it afresh each time, playing it

back and forth. ("The Art of Fiction" 110)

Jazz expresses desire that never ends. It is open on the one hand and both complicated and inaccessible on the other. Morrison's *Jazz* defies conventional literary analysis. As Eurebio L. Rodrigues notes, the narrator's voice, a written voice, hurtles along offering no explanations, dropping more bits of information that stubbornly refuse to come together and make sense (19). The intertwined strands of stories seem to lead nowhere and appear to lack coherence and pattern.

Jazz is centred on a couple of sensational incidents that took place in Harlem in 1926. Morrison made the plot from the photograph in James Van Der Zee's *Harlom Book of the Dead*, of the body of a young girl shot at a party by a jealous boyfriend. She died refusing to identify her assailant with the words: " I'll tell you tomorrow".

This incident is the subtle point in the narrative where all narrative deviations return. The protagonists -- Joe and Violet Trace -- are in their fifties. They come from rural Vesper county, Virginia. Having relocated to New York in 1906, both of them are in the beauty business. At the time of the murder, Joe is a sample-case man, who

peddles cosmetics door to door and Violet is a hair dresser, who makes house calls. Joe kills his eighteen-year-old lover, Dorcas because for he sees her dancing with a young man. *Jazz* is invented and improvised around the lives of Joe, Violet, Dorcas, their friends, neighbours and ancestors, examining the consequences of the notorious affair and murder, for which Joe is never arrested, though everybody knows that he is guilty.

Like *Jazz*, Joe's action does elude a definite judgement. However, the key --the ability to sense the beat in jazz, its driving force, sometimes powerful, sometimes subtle, that must be felt by musicians and audience alike-- is the homicide which sometimes surfaces and is sometimes hidden for the author to create and the reader to appreciate the whole narrative.

Jazz has several narrators, or points of view. The voice, which begins the narrative is well-near omniscient. This woman knows more about the protagonists than they do. However, this soloist takes her chorus quite spontaneously, following freely whatever paths are pointed out to her by the interaction of her own inspiration with that of her fellow narrators. While relating the story of Violet, she

allows syncopation create a rhythmic contradiction by displacing accents which are normal to an omniscient narrator:

> Violet is mean enough and good looking enough to think that even without hips or youth she could punish Joe by getting herself a boyfriend and letting him visit in her own house. She thought it would dry his tears up and give her some satisfaction as well. . . . Anyway, Joe didn't pay Violet or her friend any notice. Whether she sent the boy friend away or whether he quit her, I can't say. (4-5)

This disembodied narrator shuttles between the third person omniscient and the first person narrator. But this narrator also never shirks her responsibilities as a composer of jazz music. While allowing freedom to the characters, the narrator also keeps them under control. As Henry Louis Gates Jr. puts it:

> The lyrical composer of this strangest of tales, however, is at once generous

> with the voices of its characters and jealous of their right to speak, to be heard in their own melodic voices. Like Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying, Jazz* has several narrators, or points of view, whose areas or speaking consciousness bring both harmony and contrapuntal texture. (54)

This gives the narration a flexibility and capacity for producing the unexpected where in lies the essence of jazz and its elusive magnetism. It becomes a rebellion against a one-dimensional society.

Violet's four-page-long first person reflections come in the novel in a single paragraph. Joe's and Felice's narrative voices are "marked by quotation markers that the narrator has allowed them speak in their own voices" (Gates 55). This is an instance of fusing artifice and improvisation. Morrison says:

> *Jazz* was very complicated because I wanted to represent two contradictory things - artifice and improvisation, where you have an artwork, planned,

> thought through, but at the same time appears invented, like jazz. I thought of the image being a book physically a book, but at the same time it is writing itself. Imagining itself. Talking. Aware of what it is doing. It watches itself think and imagine. That seemed to me to be a combination of artifice and improvisation - where you practice and plan in order to invent. Also the willingness to fail, to be wrong because jazz is performance. In a performance you make mistakes, and you don't have the luxury of revision that a writer has; . . . jazz predicts its own story. Sometimes it is wrong because of faulty vision . . . and the characters talk back the way jazz musicians do . . . it has to listen to the characters it has invented. ("The Art of Fiction" 116-7)

To achieve this structurally was to allow several voices speak throughout the narration.

> Violet didn't know anything about the girl at first except her name, her age, and that she was very well thought of in the legally licensed beauty parlor. So she commenced to gather the rest of the information. May be she thought she could solve the mystery of love that way. Good luck and let me know.(5)

This multiple narration helps avoid a totalizing view and clear-cut judgements. The narrator who was sure, at the outset of the novel, that Joe shot Dorcas, says a few pages later that " what turned out different was who shot whom" (6). As John Gennanri remarks, the meaning of jazz is its own sound. Its meaning is never constant and generates new meanings. The central role in jazz performance of the improvised solo both puts a premium on individual style and makes it necessary for soloists constantly to seek fresh approaches to familiar material (9).

By modifying timbre and reinventing melodies characters rethink on relationships and establish difference -- to distinguish their voice against other

performers and to make distinct statements within their own oeuvre. Violet, who tries to disfigure the dead girl's face, wonders "if she isn't falling in love with her too" (15). She keeps the girl's photograph for a few days in her apartment:

> . . . in Violet's and Joe Trace's apartment the rooms are like the empty bird cages wrapped in cloth. And a dead girl's face has become a necessary thing for their nights. They each take turns to throw off the bed covers, rise up from the sagging mattress and tip toe over cold linoleum into the parlor to gaze at what seems like the only living presence in the house: the photograph of a bold, unsmiling girl, staring from the mantle piece. If the tip toer is Joe Trace, driven from loneliness from his wife's side, then the face stares at him without hope or regret and it is the absence of accusation that wakes him from his sleep,

> hungry for his company. . . . But if the tip toer is Violet the photograph is not that at all. The girl's face looks greedy, haughty and lazy. (11-12)

Dorcas is continually remade and reinvented throughout the narrative. Nevertheless her character resists any sort of framing.

The shifting rhythms, sliding harmonies and continual instrumental juxtapositions convey both the fragmentation and wholeness of space and time.

Jazz is written in the rich oral tradition of jazz talk. It composes itself as the story gets told. How the story is told is as significant as the novel's plot. A disembodied storyteller slips easily and guilelessly from third person all-knowingness to first person lyricism, without ever relaxing its grip upon our imagination (Gates 54). This narrator is sensitive, poetic and responsible as a composer towards the characters whose story is being revealed before the audience.

Jazz has challenged the norms of western art in regard to the relationship between artist and audience, shunning formal, behavioural codes, and the passivity of audience in

favour of active, spontaneous response through vocal and bodily participation. The audience is made to share a sort of responsibility even if something goes wrong in the narration:

> Risky I'd say, trying to figure out anybody's state of mind. But worth the trouble if you are like me - curious, inventive and well informed. Joe acts like he knew all about what the old folks did to keep on going, but he couldn't have known much about True Belle, for example, because I doubt Violet ever talked to him about her grandmother. So he didn't know. Neither do I, although it is not hard to imagine what it must have been like. (12)

Morrison frequently moves away from the main thread of the plot with the narrators yielding centre-stage to objective reflections of the good old days at Virginia. It is Morrison's deliberate attempt to approximate the novel

to jazz:

> When Keith Jarrel plays " Ol' Man River", the delight and satisfaction is not so much in the melody itself but in recognizing it when it surfaces and when it is hidden and when it goes away completely, what is put in its place. Not so much in the original line as in all the echoes and shades and turns and pivots Jarret plays around it. I was trying to do something similar with the plot in *Jazz*. I wanted the story to be the vehicle which moved us from page one to the end, but I wanted the delight to be found in moving away from the story and coming back to it, looking around it, and through it, as though it were a prism, constantly turning. ("The Art of Fiction" 110)

Morrison's *Jazz* attains one of the hall-marks of jazz -- its defining feature -- as the a progenitor of a new form, an inventor of new languages and a creator of new

ways to express meaning.

> With *Jazz* I wanted to convey the sense that a musician conveys - that he has more but he's not gonna give it to you. It is an exercise in restraint, a holding back - not because it is not there, or because one had exhausted it, but because of the riches, and because it can be done again. ("The Art of Fiction" 111)

If genre, according to the established canonical view, is a code of behaviour between the author and her/his reader, for writers who are prepared to shatter all conventional ideological constructs, it is irrelevant and dangerous to establish any sort of genre classifications. Doris Lessing and Toni Morrison try to redefine in their ways the canonical views on genre classification.

Conclusion

P.S. Jaya “Fiction, form and resistance: A study of the novels of Doris Lessing and Toni Morrison” Thesis. Department of English , University of Calicut, 2001

Conclusion

One of the most insistent beliefs that informs this study is that there is politics behind the aesthetics of writing by women as behind the re-reading of women's writing and feminist literary criticism. Writings by women must be viewed within, and as an aspect of social practice as much as without it and as a form of resistance to it.

Doris Lessing and Toni Morrison may, at first glance, appear too incompatible as writers to be brought under a common theoretical framework. However, a close reading of their works, as has been attempted in this dissertation, proves that they do share certain common ground. Apart from the fact that they voice the same gender concerns in terms of how social and cultural factors appear from a female point of view, in their literary representations of 'the personal as political', both of them explore the dimensions of literature and society in a more or less similar manner. Both of them demystify accepted and oppressive aspects of cultural tradition that legitimise certain practices in

literature. They have experimented at length on, to speak in Jean Ricardou's words, "how the novel ceases to be the writing of a story to become the story of a writing" (78). Both are concerned with disrupting the traditional boundaries between the dominant and the marginal.

True, critics like Hazel Carby, have often argued against equating the historical and social position of a black woman with that of a white woman (26) as they feel that white women always stand in power relations as oppressors of black women.

However, as feminists like Avtar Brah say, 'difference' need not invariably lead to divisions among black and white women. Coalitions are possible through a politics of identification as opposed to a politics of identity (33-34).

Postmodern writers are highly conscious of the complexity and protean nature of reality. It is too chaotic to be structured into a literary form using conventional tools. A genuine awareness of this dissolution of the material reality and the inadequacy of traditional techniques to represent it compel Lessing and Morrison to experiment with innovative techniques.

The various equations of power also contribute to the complexity of life, especially that of the marginalized. Each literary work exists within the power structures which control life in the society. These power structures take the shape of certain pre-set forms and modes of writing. So, to break with these canonical norms is to resist the hegemonic powers of a society which exercises a devastating influence on the lives of the marginalized. While discarding the established modes of writing the writers who belong to the marginalized group are able to both represent the kaleidoscopic reality and resist the excruciating effects of the power structures of the society.

Form often becomes a potent tool of resistance as it is often the bearer of ideology in literature. A transformation in form invariably signifies a transformation in ideology. The search for new forms that are powerful enough to voice various kinds of resistance towards dominant ideology leads Lessing and Morrison to the world of fantasy, which is beyond the limit of the dominant cultural order. Fantasy helps transcend reality, escape human condition and construct superior, alternative worlds.

Lessing and Morrison use the modes of the fantastic in their fiction to undo the unifying structures and significations that direct and sustain the social order. Elements of fantasy are used with a deep political sensitivity, to fulfil the desire for a better, more complete and less painful reality.

In many novels of Lessing's and Morrison's, the abnormal consciousness is explored to effect a radical critique of reality and narrative realism. Madness is projected as a peculiar creative manifestation of the aberrated consciousness. Many of the narrators in Lessing's and Morrison's works appear to be devoid of any kind of authoritative judgement. Often the narrative voice is either that of an insane or an immature person. The narrative is sometimes an orchestra of various voices. The traditional concept of time is thwarted in order to attain a timeless mythical realm of the past or of one's own inner consciousness. Lessing and Morrison are even more ambitious in their attempts to disrupt the very concept of genre distinctions. They mix up genres to breach all sorts of containment and categorisation which canonical structures offer.

The works of both Lessing and Morrison do not easily lend themselves to a unified critical analysis. The dialectic of tension between the desire of the individual and the ethics of society raises a considerable amount of challenge to a reader of conventional narratives. These writers startle the reader with their new methods of experiencing and expressing the illusive reality.

Doris Lessing was brought up in a country, where she always lived in a torment of conscientiousness. In Rhodesia, she was a member of the white minority pitted against a black majority that was abominably treated. She was amidst this whole pattern of discrimination, tyranny and violence. The black in Rhodesia was much more exploited and oppressed than the African American. Lessing worked with the communist party there, the proclaimed objective of which was the liberation of the black.

Lessing's first novel *The Grass is Singing* (1950), which gave her overnight fame, is as much about race problem as about women and liberation. The guilt the woman of the colonizer bears in spite of her lack of willingness and direct involvement in the deed has become the theme of many stories of Lessing.

Lessing's role is that of an intermediary between the oppressor and the oppressed. In her position as an interpolator however, she is drawn nearer to the oppressed as she identifies herself more with them than with the aggressor, being also a victim of male duress.

Doris Lessing is now recognised as one of the greatest literary figures of the twentieth century. She has addressed the most urgent concerns of our age, personal and political, through diverse forms -- novels, short stories, essays and journalism. She is a writer of extraordinary versatility.

Toni Morrison has been a compelling and disturbing presence in the literary scenario ever since the publication of her first novel *The Bluest Eye* in 1970. Her approach embodies the politics of race as well as that of sex and class. Being an editor herself Morrison wanted to write books that she wanted to read (Tate 122). She is a highly self-conscious writer who investigates the ways in which the black presence in white America has been constructed and the literary uses this presence may have served:

> I am interested in what prompts and

> makes possible this process of entering what one is estranged from. . . . My work requires me to think about how free I can be as an African American woman writer in my genderised, sexualised, and wholly racialised world. To think about (and wrestle with) the full implications of my situation leads me to consider what happens when other writers work in a highly and historically racialised society. For them, as for me, imagining is not merely looking or looking at; nor is it taking oneself intact into the other. It is, for the purpose of the work, becoming. (*Playing in the Dark* 4)

In 1993 Morrison became the first African American to win the Nobel Prize for literature. She has added substantially to the body of African American literature through both her fictional and non-fictional writings. Her critical essays have enlarged African American aesthetics with their specific readings of black literary works, and their illuminatory insights on the

relevance of African American literature towards a clearer understanding of contemporary black life, society and culture.

Although hailing from disparate social contexts, both Doris Lessing and Toni Morrison have much in common as far as the sophisticated formal experiments in their works are concerned. In fact this is *the* literary rendezvous, where two literary geniuses cast off their insularities.

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